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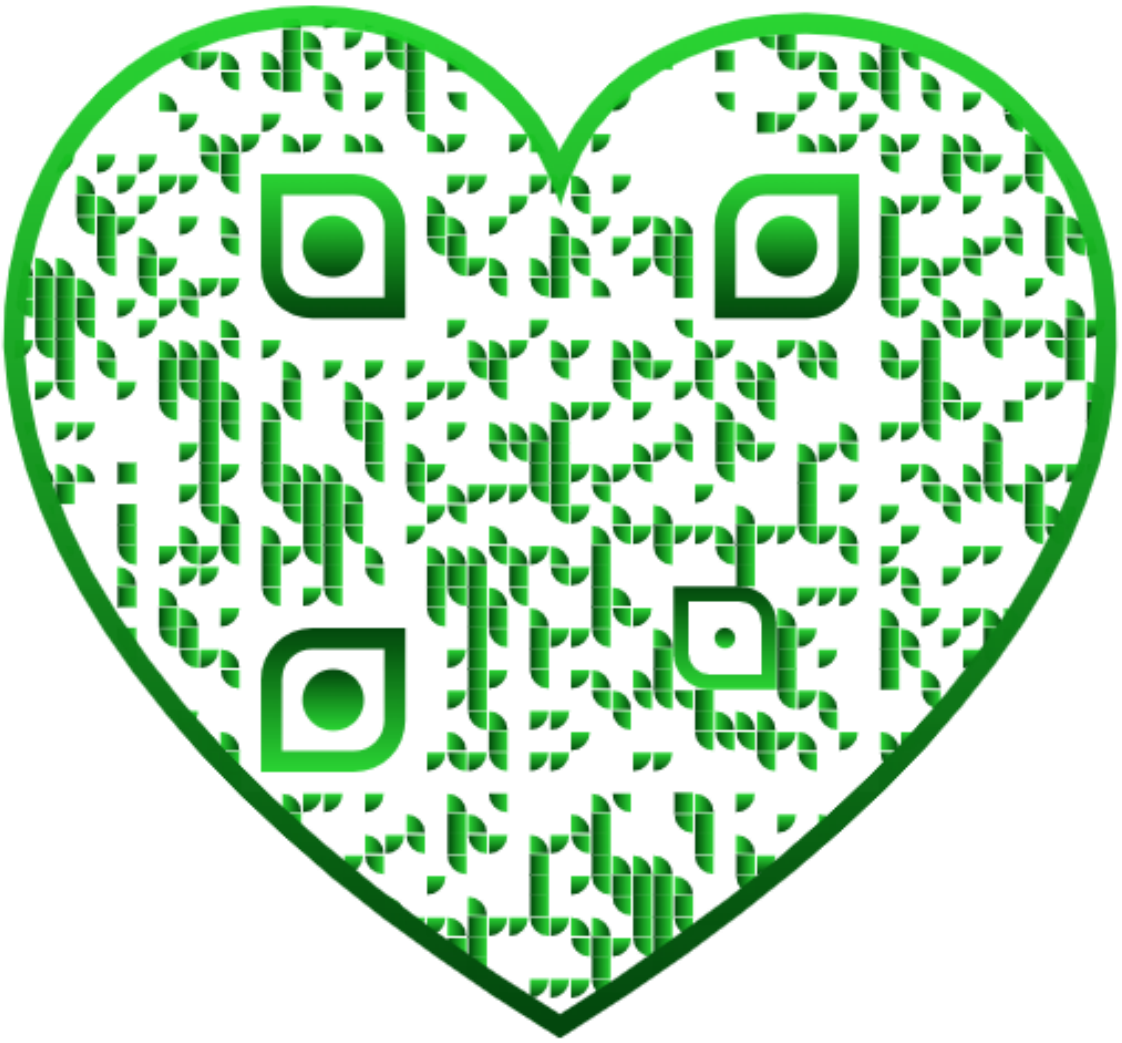

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V44 NO2

"Doctor Dean..."

Whenever I answered the phone and heard those two words, I knew that Butch Trucks had something in mind for me and that the game was afoot.

Butch was a true original. There are many who aspire to such a tag, but he earned it with his words and deeds—both onstage and off.

He was a dynamic player who could stake a claim for his role in one of rock's most enduring and influential drumming tandem .

Beyond that, though, he was a Southern raconteur, an avid reader, an active gamer, a serial entrepreneur and a family enthusiast.

I fir t spent extended time with him back in June 1999, when he joined me on the fir t half of our Jambands.com tour. He had just founded his Flying Frog Records label and took to the road with us so he could scout for bands alongside Oteil Burbridge. I will forever treasure that very fir t night in Philadelphia, when we sat down and shared a bottle of red wine. He was free with his wisdom and wit (and also his opinions, as anyone who ever spent time with him can attest). Beyond that, though, I recall how welcoming he was, drawing me in and inviting me to join his special cabal of fellow improvisational-rock disciples. I know many other folks who enjoyed similar experiences with him over the years.

Before lauding some of his other achievements, I should point out that Butch was a very physical drummer, and that this style took its toll on his body (as he would tell you, if you pressed him on it). I mention this because, since Butch was also a social progressive, I think it's worth reminding folks that health care remains an issue for many of our musical heroes and future musical heroes. (To be clear, I am not suggesting that deficient medical c verage played a role in his life, but rather as a *mitzvah* in his memory, I am reminding all of us that this concern plagues many of his fellow musicians and it is something that merits our attention.)

Butch Trucks, Caroline Barrett Budnick (who will graduate from high school this spring) and Leanne Barrett at the TLA on 6/2/99, after Butch cleared the way for The Slip to perform.

What else?

He was forward-thinking, perhaps a bit too much so, in certain respects. He created the Moogis livestreaming service a few years before most ISPs were ready or willing to offer the equisite bandwidth. His Flying Frog label was home to groups such as The Slip and Schleigho, who could be somewhat abstruse for certain folks' tastes (although both acts remain beloved to many). He created Frogwings as a way to perform some shows with his nephew Derek (before Derek joined the Allman Brothers Band), enlisting a stellar lineup that only continues to gain renown: John Popper, Jimmy Herring, Oteil Burbridge and Kofi urbridge. We were able to get them to reunite for a swan song at the 2000 Jammys (with Susan Tedeschi on vocals) and, for many years thereafter, a number of us held out hope that Butch would thread the scheduling needle for an additional go-round.

He had wide-ranging musical tastes. Anyone who would ever derisively dismiss him as a Southern-rock archetype (whatever that even is) should know that he cited a Mahavishnu Orchestra show as his favorite live experience in *Relix*'s 40th anniversary issue (and he continued to turn on folks to their debut album, *The Inner Mounting Flame*).

He appreciated the legacy of the Allman Brothers Band and remained a staunch advocate for Duane Allman. One of my many future disappointments is that I'll never be able to read the book he was going to write about Duane.

He resented petty tyrants or anyone who exercised their power arbitrarily (which gives you some idea about what he thought of our current president). Back to that opening night of the Jambands.com tour in June 1999, we were at the TLA in Philadelphia, and The Slip (who were still many months away from signing with Flying Frog) found themselves lost in transit. When the trio showed up for their load-in a half-hour late (in this era before everyone toted cell phones), but still nearly fi e hours before showtime, the production manager refused to let them place their gear onstage. He explained that Paul Simon had kowtowed to his bidding the previous night and that The Slip were, by no means, as famous as Paul Simon. Butch politely expressed his dismay at this. (Really, I was there. He was quite restrained—seething but restrained.) Then he made a call to Larry Magid, so that sanity and good vibes could prevail. This underscored a lesson I was still grasping: The one true capital within the music industry may well be relationships. A few hours later, The Slip took the stage and welcomed Butch and Oteil out for a song to put a glorious exclamation point on the evening.

While Butch Trucks has passed, I believe that the musical circle remains unbroken because he shared so much of himself for so long with so many of us, and not just with his accomplished nephews. He was everybody's Uncle Butch.

DEAN BUDNICK
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ON THE COVER

Rachael Wright shot Ryan Adams.

CONTENTS
MARCH 2017

DEPARTMENTS

8 **Dear Relix**
Letters, comments and more

10 **The Beat**
Jam Cruise 15

12 **Soundcheck**
Live reviews and news from around the globe

17 **Festival Guide: Set I**
The first installment in our signature survey of this year's best fests

18 **Exposed**
MichaelWeintrob's *INSTRUMENTHEAD*

20 **My Page**
Writer and comedian Eliot Glazer toes the line between a concert and a comedy show

21 **In Remembrance**
The Allman Brothers Band's Butch Trucks

22 **On The Verge**
5 artists you should know about

24 **At Work**
Sinkane, Joey Alexander

25 **Spotlight**
Chicano Batman, Holly Bowling

28 **The Core**
Keller Williams

29 **Track by Track**
Real Estate's *In Mind*

31 **Behind The Scene**
Music attorney Janine Small

32 **The Blues Route**
Elvin Bishop

33 **Interview**
Paul Sha° er

58 **Reviews**
New album releases, plundering the vaults and more

80 **Parting Shots**
Alison Krauss

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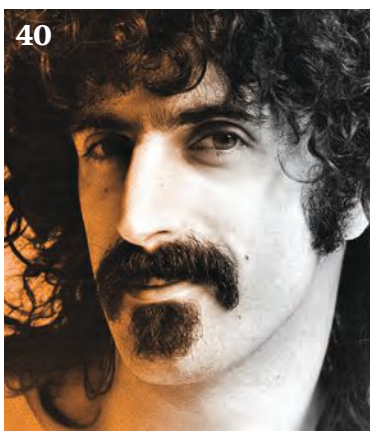

FEATURES

52 I Really, Truly Still Love You, New York
Ryan Adams has presented himself in many ways over the years. There's been the sensitive singer-songwriter, alt-country troubadour, cosmic psychedelic-cowboy, Lower East Side punk barfly, black-metal enthusiast and even the unexpected Taylor Swift supporter. But Adams' latest o° ering, the unusually polished *Prisoner*, is unlike anything the prolific musician has released—a deeply personal collection written in the wake of his high-profile divorce and inspired by his '80s jogging playlists. Editor-in-Chief **Mike Greenhaus** spent time with Adams in New York and explains how this prisoner escaped his emotional prison.

49 A Soulful Salvation
Four years since their last studio e° ort, **Robert Randolph & The Family Band** have returned with their fifth album, *Got Soul*. This record is their shortest—but most imaginative—one yet, drawing in such guests as Darius Rucker, Anthony Hamilton and Snarky Puppy's Cory Henry. It also marks a new fertile period for the pedal-steel guitarist, who speaks with **Matt Norlander** about his recommitment to his music.

46 The Modern String Quintet
Greensky Bluegrass have emerged as one of the most prominent string bands on the live-music circuit, woodshedding their way from open mic nights to marquee festival stages and sold-out shows on large-scale stages. Yet, they're really a rock-and-roll band at heart and are still regularly inspired by their youthful Phish tour days. And, as Assistant Editor **Matt Inman** discovers, following the release of their **Steve Berlin**-produced sixth album, *Shouted, Written Down & Quoted*, they've finally reached the upper echelon of that very same jamband scene.

42 Rabbit Tricks
Sleigh Bells have been described in a number of ways since they burst out of the hipster underground—loud, abrasive, brash, intense, metallic and even schizophrenic. Yet they've rarely, if ever, been thought of as idyllic. But, since parting ways with their label, this noise-pop duo has entered a new, peaceful period following singer **Alexis Krauss**' Upstate New York move and their new, self-released LP, *Jessica Rabbit*. **Justin Jacobs** joins them on their latest roller-coaster ride—one that's both melodic and robotic.

40 Securing Zappa's Vault
Frank Zappa taped everything—every session, performance, rehearsal and even casual jams. So when the legendary guitarist and composer passed away in 1993 of prostate cancer, he left behind a catalog of unreleased material as unique and diverse as his singular voice. But, especially since his wife's recent death, the question of how to mine that material has emerged. **Larson Sutton** recently spoke with the archive's current gatekeepers and o° ers a deep dive into Zappa's seemingly infinite well.

37 Army of One
Grandaddy arrived in the midst of the 21st-century hipster boom, but the Modesto, Calif.-based project was never your average blogger buzz-band. As **Jason Lytle** freely admits, Grandaddy was always more of his mouthpiece than a band of equals. And, while Lytle struggled with his own demons and a divorce, his group faded into the background. **Ryan Reed** caught up with one of the indie scene's most original voices around the release of Grandaddy's first album in over a decade—one equally inspired by his personal tales and fan-friendly thoughts.

34 It's (Still) Only Life
The Feelies are back, again. Quintessential critical darlings, the New Jersey outfit seemingly inspired everyone from R.E.M. to Yo La Tengo and Real Estate, yet never achieved commercial success. But, a few breaks aside, the quintet is still around, churning out wholly original music equally suitable for crate-diggers and Deadheads. Contributing Editor **Jesse Jarnow** o° ers some insight into how this oft-overlooked outfit has survived for more than 40 years.

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DEAR RELIX

Here's what readers are talking about online and offli

DEAR RELIX

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Send your thoughts to letters@relix.com.

THE UNBROKEN CIRCLE

This should surely pave the way for a long-awaited, in-depth biography of one of the world's most respected and influential bands (Nitty Gritty Dirt Band: The Golden Circle," December 2016). Please get it underway before it's forgotten or ignored how important the NGDB are to real musicians out there, not only as a source of great music but also as an example of how to survive! *John M Brown via Relix.com*

THE GOLDEN TICKET (OR TAPE)

In January, radio personality Michael Caputo issued a request for a non-circulating recording of the Grateful Dead's March 17, 1970 impromptu show with the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra. Caputo offe ed $500 to anyone who could produce a copy of that night's performance and our readers investigated just where the tape could've ended up.

Did someone ask the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra to see if they recorded their performances back then? Is that a likely place to start?

Ancient Head via Relix.com

If the soundboard didn't have it, then it probably doesn't exist. Never heard of it, and I am 71 years old and have been on the bus since 1967.

Jimmy Tree via Relix.com

Best thing would be to give up the tape (if it exists) under the condition the $500 and a portion of any profit be given to the Rex Foundation.

Brian Koehler Jr. via Facebook

Just based on the digging others have done, this show definitely occur ed, as many BPO members as well as the openers have recalled it and specific instances in the show. But it seems that because Bear wasn't on the tour, the likelihood of it being recorded was really low. So as much as I want to believe even raising something exorbitant like $50k for the Rex Foundation or a private collector would do the trick, this one will most likely never surface. And what a damn shame. *Andrew Hunt via Facebook*

Nitty Gritty Dirt Band

I heard legend of this when I was living in Buffalo but, at that tim , even asking the Philharmonic staff esulted in them telling me that it never happened.

Chuck Mottern via Facebook

RECORD STORE PROFILE:
SONIC BOOM, TORONTO

Toronto is deep into a vinyl resurgence, thanks to the numerous local shops popping up around the Canadian city, and its largest room lives on Spadina Avenue in an old historical building. Sonic Boom remains a required stop while venturing through Toronto to stock up on vinyl, regardless of genre.

FANS.COM PHOTO CONTEST

Reel Big Fish saxophonist Matt Appleton performs in Maryland at The Fillmore Silver Spring, Jan. 17, 2017. Photo by Mark Raker Photography/ BestPlayDateEver

Want to be published in *Relix*? Just upload an original photo from a live music event to Relix.com's Fans.com Photo Contest app. Noted photographer Jay Blakesberg will select the winner from the group of 10 finali ts who receives the most votes.

INSTAPRINT

Shortly after the New Year, comedy and music intersected at the Hotel Café in Los Angeles, where John Mayer was performing an intimate acoustic show ahead of his forthcoming solo return, *The Search for Everything*. Comedian Dave Chappelle crashed the stage, joining Mayer on vocals for tunes like Nirvana's "Come as You Are" and Tom Petty's "Free Fallin'." Mayer (@johnmayer) joked that he and Chappelle "do this in different cities until five in the morning."

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JAM CRUISE 15

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JANUARY 20–25, 2017

BY MATT INMAN // PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVE VANN

The beauty of **Jam Cruise** is not necessarily in its lineup alone—although this year's celebratory 15th trip boasted a particularly strong mix of players—but more in the communal spirit that pervades both the acts invited to perform and the fans that share the ship with them. In certain ways, the fi e-day cruise is simply the backdrop for the countless chance meetings, conversations with strangers and once-in-a-life-time musical collaborations that have become the destination event's true hallmark since its maiden voyage in 2004.

A defining cha acteristic of the yearly festival-at-sea has been its dedication to the music of New Orleans, and this year's lineup highlighted that rich culture as much as, if not more than, any Jam Cruise in the past. The big story in 2017, of course, was the rare appearances by the original lineup of Crescent City legends and funk godfathers **The Meters**, who offered headlining sets on Sunday and Tuesday.

The two performances saw the original quartet of **George Porter Jr.**, **Zigaboo Modeliste**, **Leo Nocentelli** and **Art Neville** run through many of their classic tunes, including "Funkify Your Life," "Cissy Strut," "Fire on the Bayou" and "Be My Lady," as well as a cover of The Beatles' "Come Together" with guest vocals from Neville's brother and former Meters frontman **Cyril Neville**. Their nephew, Dumpstaphunk's **Ivan Neville**, also provided support on keys throughout the two sets. Despite their ages—Art, at 79, is the oldest of both The Meters and The Neville Brothers and showed signs of it, laying back and letting Ivan take over at times—the quartet showed they still had more than enough funk left in them to deliver a stellar show.

Each night, the band also brought out a substantial horn section that featured members of **The Soul Rebels** and **The Shady Horns**, along with a special guest spot from **Kamasi Washington** during their final set. The shows offe ed some endearing non-musical moments, too: Porter's daughter **Katrina** came out during night one to surprise her father with a vow renewal for him and his wife **Ara**, who celebrated their 50th anniversary, and again on their second night to award the four members with crystal microphone statues commemorating The Meters' own golden anniversary.

Another standout performance came from the less high-profile but till beloved reunion of **Marco Benevento** and **Joe Russo**, known together simply as **The Duo**. The paired performers graced the Stardust Theater stage on Saturday night for their fir t announced performance since 2010—not including the stealth show The Duo played in Brooklyn in late December—and offe ed some

Karl Denson has been a Jam Cruise staple since the beginning.

In addition to their own shows, the members of Lettuce sat in with a slew of artists throughout the festival at sea.

Funk founders The Meters kicked off their golden anniversary during the five-day journey .

Galactic, who have performed aboard Jam Cruise every year since its inception, welcome Cyril Neville and Will Bernard.

of the most energetic playing of the entire cruise, combining multiple keyboards, acoustic drums and a whirlwind of electronic sounds. They also opened up their stage for a quick sit-in from one of the most visible Jam Cruise 15 artists at large, saxophonist **Skerik**, for a song he recorded with Russo and Benevento, "Scratchitti," and closed their set with their signature number, "Becky," which they have jokingly rebranded as "Rebecca" since their reunion.

Besides the individual artist performances this year, which also included fantastic sets from Washington, **Turkuaz**, **The Revivalists**, **Galactic** and more, the theme of any Jam Cruise is collaboration. Whether it is through a planned jam or a one-off si -in, dozens of musicians on a boat together for fi e days are bound to play together.

This was never more true than when the cruise's second stop at Grand Cayman Island was canceled on Monday, leaving cruisers with an open morning and afternoon. Festival organizers ended up putting together pop-up sets from **Twiddle**'s **Mihali Savoulidis** and **The Brothers Comatose**, along with a massive Grateful Dead tribute on the Pool Deck that featured **Steve Kimock**, **Reed Mathis**, **Jay Lane** and **The Motet**'s **Joey Porter**, along with guests like **Karl Denson**, **Shook Twins**, and **Lesley Grant**.

Nikki Glaspie, who sat in on sets in both the Jazz Lounge and on the main stages throughout the cruise—including for a cover of Rage Against the Machine's "Killing in the Name" with Galactic—led the final d y's Super Jam on the top deck, welcoming an impressive number of funk-leaning artists and closing out with members of **Lettuce**, Turkuaz, The Motet and more collaborating on Stevie Wonder's "Black Man."

The late-night Jam Room sessions are always a highlight of Jam Cruise, and this year's performances were punctuated by two appearances by Porter, who helped Kimock on Saturday night for a jam that featured Mathis, Jam Cruise workhorse **Robert Walter**, **Todd Stoops**, **moe.**'s **Al Schnier** and **Vinnie Amico**, Widespread Panic's **JoJo Hermann** and an assortment of other artists, before the bassist led his own Jam Room session on Monday night with a slew of guests, plus a special sit-in from a 15-year-old drumming phenom from Long Island, **Jager Soss**.

Whether it was Schnier playing a rare solo set and talking about how he set up a sit-in from **Love Canon**'s **Jay Starling** at 4:30 in the morning ("The challenge was: Who was going to remember?"), **The Hip Abduction's David New** delivering one of the most telling onstage quotes of the cruise ("Every elevator ride has been a story I can tell for at least three years") or the early-morning outdoor-deck jams by The Brothers Comatose, Shook Twins and whoever wanted to join, Jam Cruise 15 proved that shared experiences undoubtedly lead to unforgettable creativity.

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Soundcheck

LIVE REVIEWS AND NEWS FROM AROUND THE GLOBE *Compiled by* DEAN BUDNICK

"A Song I Heard the Ocean Sing": Phish on the beach in Mexico

Peter Wallace

PHISH

BARCELÓ MAYA BEACH RIVIERA MAYA, QUINTANA ROO, MEXICO JANUARY 13–15

It took **Phish** over 30 years to play their first concert in Mexico, and from the initial announcement for last year's inaugural event, you could tell it was going to be a surreal experience: three intimate shows packaged as part of an all-inclusive experience and held on the sandy shores of the Barceló Maya Beach Resort. And, from the moment hundreds of fans waded into the ocean for the first time on opening night, it was clear that this wasn't going to be a one-off xperiment. So it was no surprise that this January's second offering had a familiar feel from the start.

Before the band took the stage on Friday, fans made their way through the stunningly decorated entrance to the beach venue along the ocean. Like its predecessor, the atmosphere felt like a Phish festival, with healthy doses of tequila and tacos. The palm trees were lit up and intricately crocheted. There was a mariachi band, colorful costumes and mind-bending art installations hanging in the sky. All of this came together in brilliant synergy with the music and the elements of nature to create an all-around masterpiece destination. Most memorable of all, perhaps, was the moon. Each night, *la luna* would peek out just above the horizon. At times, **Trey Anastasio** seemed to notice and would turn to welcome her to the party. Just as the moon was full and brilliant, the wind was also powerful. A certain energy arrived with that wind—the fog that typically settled in on the crowd blew across the stage with ferocity.

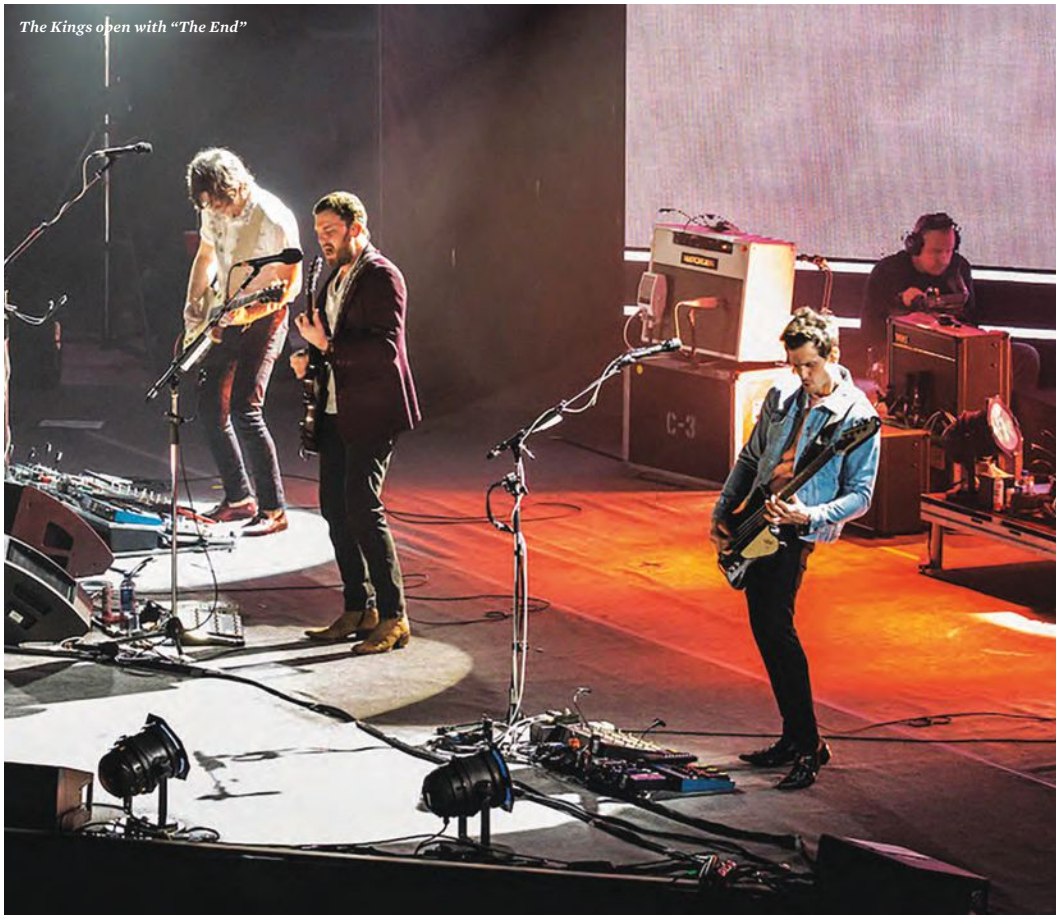
Musically, Phish picked up right where they left off at the 2016 event, bringing with them songs that paid tribute to the different elements of the surrounding ocean world. The setlists this time around, much like last year's, made it feel like these songs were composed with this place in mind. Whether "splashing in the sea" during the "Free" opener, or getting down with their toes in the "Sand" during the first set on Friday night, fans welcomed the band back to Mexico with a vacation fervor. Phish matched that destination energy, often visibly taking in moments for themselves. The location references continued as Phish played fitting versions

of "Theme From the Bottom" and "A Song I Heard the Ocean Sing," before ripping a sometimes dark and often wailing 50-minute segment of music that included "Fuego," "Prince Caspian," "Twist" and "Seven Below." Those watching from the ocean celebrated and floated accordingly.

Saturday night brought less wind with it. The quartet followed a welcome "The Curtain With" opener with another 1980s relic, "AC/DC Bag," which segued into a *Big Boat* tune inspired by last year's Mexico festivities, "Breath and Burning." Phish then slowed the first set's tempo down before a strong finish with "Fast Enough for You," "Ocelot" and "Chalk Dust Torture." Saturday's jam-heavy second set started off with "Crosseyed and Painless" and "Blaze On," but it was the sequence that ran through "Meatstick," "Winterqueen," "Mercury" and "Light" that stole the show, and maybe the weekend.

Phish returned to form on Sunday, kicking things off ith a lively cover of Stevie Wonder's "Boogie on Reggae Woman." Keeping the momentum going, they followed with "Simple" and the Mexico debut of "Tweezer." The crowd was rowdy, and the band was dialed in. After settling into "Roggae" and the *Undermind* rarity "Nothing," which had been shelved since 2015, Phish rolled through tightly woven versions of "Ghost," "Ya Mar," "Stealing Time" and "Rift" before blowing the hatches off ith a "Fluffhead" set-one closer. The high-energy final set moved toward its peak with a "Down With Disease" opener that gave way to animated versions of "Sneakin' Sally Through the Alley," "Carini" and "David Bowie," setting the stage for a perfectly played "Harry Hood." Phish closed the weekend—and the vacation—with the winning combo of "Slave"> "Tweezer Reprise." A band that rarely tours outside of the United States has clearly found a second home south of the border. ***Peter Wallace***

Bill Kelly



The Kings open with "The End"

KINGS OF LEON

MADISON SQUARE GARDEN
NEW YORK
JANUARY 20

Sometimes it takes a while for a concert to find its groove. That was certainly the case for **Kings of Leon** when they brought the tour for their latest album, *WALLS*, to Madison Square Garden. After a dynamic opening trio of "The End," "Slow Night, So Long" and "McFearless," the setlist featured a few jarring transitions, like going from the shiny new "Muchacho" to the searing garage-rock of "Molly's Chambers." The music sounded excellent, but for a band that was once touted as having the potential to be Southern rock's answer to U2, and who are more than experienced playing to large crowds, there was just something lacking in their command of the stage. Perhaps the band was a little tired; their tour was just picking up, and the New York show had the unfortunate luck of being on the same day as Donald Trump's inauguration, which was a taxing day for many.

This was highlighted all the more by the strong opening set from indie-rock critical darlings **Deerhunter**, who seemed like a strange pick to open an arena date but whose frontman, **Bradford Cox**, turned in a perfectly weird and showy performance.

But then, halfway through the Kings' set, following the obviously crowd-pleasing "Sex on Fire," the band brought a curtain down near the stage's lip and frontman **Caleb Followill** delivered a stirring solo acoustic performance of "The Runner," off f 2007's *Because of the Times*. It proved to be a welcome break, and Kings of Leon kept things interesting with "Comeback Story," which saw the rest of the band aiding Caleb with some minimal percussion and harmonies. The members returned behind the curtain as Caleb began the title track off he new album, and as the song reached its crescendo of a finale, the curtain rose to reveal the stage rearranged—including new screens and lighting—and the group kicked into overdrive. Something clicked in that moment between Kings of Leon and the crowd, and the show continued to pick up steam with each song.

New numbers, like "Find Me" and "Reverend," flowed seamlessly with the group's older tracks, and each member seemed to step it up—working the crowd while truly getting *into* the music they were playing. **Matthew Followill**'s lead guitar work, in particular, had a habit of lighting up every song with a fie y intensity and sense of rollicking rock-and-roll fun. "Use Somebody," the band's ubiquitous 2008 hit, is one of those songs that you need to hear sung by an arena full of people to feel its real impact. The group closed things out with *WALLS*' "Around the World" and set off a air of confetti cannons over the crowd. One of the two delivered a humorously delayed blast, but once both were going, the audience ate it up, which seems like a pretty solid metaphor for the show itself. ***Carter Shelter***

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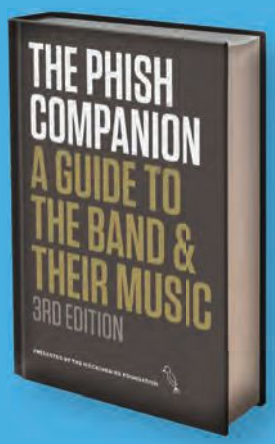

The third edition of **The Phish Companion: A Guide to the Band & Their Music** is more than an essential reference guide. It's a hard-bound, 898-page, full-color feast for the senses.

- Thousands of freshly-manicured setlists, song histories, and charts
- Hundreds of evocative show reviews and fan stories
- 128 pages of dazzling Phish photography, most of which has never been published
- Stunning original art

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SUNSHINE MUSIC FESTIVAL

VINOY PARK
ST. PETERSBURG, FLA.
JANUARY 14

Outdoor music festivals are almost as ubiquitous as sightings of giant alligators during the first few months of the year in Florida. And the **Sunshine Music Festival**, formerly the Sunshine Blues Festival—which celebrated its fifth season with twin editions in St. Petersburg and Boca Raton—has become a favorite on the state's fest circuit. More than 6,000 attendees, who seemed to be split between the jamband faithful and blues aficionados, turned out for the St. Pete show, again capped with a muscular, ambitious main-stage performance by the **Tedeschi Trucks Band**. The 12-piece group, often sounding twice that large, thrived on the irresistible combination of **Susan Tedeschi**'s soulful, husky singing and pithy six-string work, **Derek Trucks**' spiritual slide guitar solos, a hard-driving two-drummer rhythm section and artful arrangements that take full advantage of a band that includes three horn players and a trio of backup singers.

Several TTB originals served as event highlights, including closing tune "Bound for Glory," "Midnight in Harlem," and both the title track and "Right on Time" from last year's *Let Me Get By* album. TTB also mixed in intriguing covers of Allen Toussaint's "Get Out of My Life, Woman," played on the late New Orleans pianist-composer's 79th birthday, a gospel-infused version of Leonard Cohen's "Bird on the Wire" and a stripped-down take on George Jones' "Color of the Blues."

Groove music might be the thread that ties together the fest's divergent scenes. But its eclectic bent was also demonstrated on the second stage, starting with Austin blues-funk duo **Greyhounds** and continuing with the rolling mountain rhythms and electric-acoustic textures of **Railroad Earth.** The group applied guitar, banjo, mandolin, fiddle, upright bass and saxophones to the Jerry Garcia staple "My Sisters and Brothers" and other jamgrass gems.

Legendary soul singer **Mavis Staples** thrilled with brassy belting on her signature "I'll Take You There," the 1972 Staple Singers hit, as well as that group's "Touch a Hand, Make a Friend" and "Respect Yourself." She also o° ered a low-slung funk R&B workout on the Talking Heads' "Slippery People," Ben Harper's "Love and Trust," the spiritual "Wade in the Water" and "You Are Not Alone," from her 2010 album of the same name. Guitarist **Luther Dickinson**, from main-stage opening act **North Mississippi Allstars**, sat in briefly, and Staples o° ered encouragement to those disheartened by the recent Presidential Election: "Don't let fear get in your way. This is our country!"

Basking in the evening's Sunshine

Bruce Hornsby also appeared on the second stage with his five-piece **Noisemakers** band, kicking things o° with strong versions of "On the Western Skyline," featuring some choice accordion work, and "White Wheeled Limousine." Later, he grabbed his dulcimer for a mostly unplugged sequence including "There's a Hole in My Bucket" and "The Valley Road."

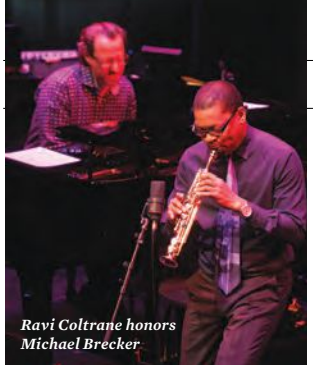
On the main stage, NMA brought a crowd-pleasing blast of heavy blues-rock, with fiery renditions of "Sitting on Top of the World," "Deep Elem Blues" and "Going Down the Road Feelin' Bad." **Joe Russo's Almost Dead** continued their festival-scene takeover with dance-inducing renditions of "Eyes of the World" (which included keyboardist **Marco Benevento**'s quick reference to Miles Davis' "Four"), "Shakedown Street," "One More Saturday Night" and other Dead favorites. And in the classic-rock hitmaker slot was Tra″ c co-founder **Dave Mason**, whose voice and guitar playing were robust on his own hit "We Just Disagree" and his old band's "Rock and Roll Stew," "Dear Mr. Fantasy," "The Low Spark of High Heeled Boys" and "Feelin' Alright." ***Philip Booth***

THE NEARNESS OF YOU CONCERT – IN HONOR OF MICHAEL BRECKER

THE APPEL ROOM, JAZZ AT LINCOLN CENTER
NEW YORK
JANUARY 25

Bill and **Hillary Clinton** had at least one victory night this January, and it certainly took place at a fitting event. Though billed as a loving celebration of legendary tenor saxophonist Michael Brecker, who passed away after a battle with leukemia in 2007, "The Nearness

Wesley Hodges



Ravi Coltrane honors Michael Brecker

of You" concert was really about openness and understanding—honoring both Brecker's ability to break down boundaries between jazz, rock and pop, and the diverse mix of cultures he touched as a sideman and soloist. With proceeds benefiting Columbia University Medical Center (CUMC) and the work of Azra Raza and Siddhartha Mukherjee, the concert also served as a sobering reminder of a disease impacting all, regardless of race, religion or ethnic background.

"The Nearness of You" was not an outwardly political event, yet the show's overriding themes of diversity and unity particularly resonated during a multicultural gathering held less than a week after President Trump's White House ascent and the protests that followed. The Clintons—who enlisted Brecker to play both the 1993 and 1997 inaugurations, as well as other benefits—acted as silent contributors throughout the night. They sat, grooving in the front row, as seemingly every performer acknowledged their presence, and the pair even stuck around post-show to mingle with the intimate audience. (Hillary granted her first post-inauguration interview with a major publication before the concert, too.)

After a few introductions and a short performance by **Chase Baird**, Jazz at Lincoln Center visionary **Wynton Marsalis** opened up the meat of the show with a swinging selection from the floor, in front of the stage's lip, before introducing and accompanying **Dianne Reeves** for "Skylark." The singer had a bit of trouble locking in with the rhythm section at first, but the snafu helped loosen up the crowd and set the evening's salon-like feel. She o¸ ered a show highlight in a lounge-style rearrangement of Fleetwood Mac's "Dreams," which served as a nod to both Brecker's first great ensemble and the authors of Bill Clinton's '92 campaign rally favorite. Next, the evening's focus shifted to Brecker's signature instrument for an all-star jam featuring his Saxophone Summit collaborators **Dave Liebman** and **Joe Lovano**, as well as **Ravi Coltrane**. They traded blows on a dynamic cover of "India," a selection by Ravi's father, John, using the occasion to note the Eastern world's continued influence on one of the most traditional forms of American music. **Diana Krall** followed up that instrumental selection with some vocal tunes, including her piano twist on the evening's eponymous song.

Brecker lit a fire under jazz musicians around the world during his years on the festival circuit, and Israeli saxophonist **Eli Degibri** represented the younger generation of players he touched during his travels with a take on "Cli¸ Hangin'." The event's focus then shifted to Brecker's work in the pop and R&B worlds with the help of headliner **Chaka Khan**. The Queen of Funk focused on material she recorded while working with the saxophonist in the 1980s, like "Night in Tunisia," "So Naughty" and "We Can Work It Out." The latter song unfolded into a group sing-along boasting most of the evening's featured guests and accompanists, including musical director and Fab Faux bassist **Will Lee**, cross-genre keyboardist **Robert Glasper** and drummer **Rodney Holmes**. The celebratory results were clearly worthy of an inaugural ball.

Mike Greenhaus

THE CALIFORNIA HONEYDROPS

TROUBADOUR
LOS ANGELES
JANUARY 14

The versatile Lech Wierzynski sounds the horn

Over much of the past year, **The California Honeydrops** have held the opening slot on the legendary Bonnie Raitt's tour. While the honor has certainly exposed the Oakland-based quintet to larger audiences in equally larger venues across the country, it has also concentrated their frequently boundless sets to limited time slots. So when the Bay Area band headlined an evening of their own—a sold-out Saturday night at West Hollywood's iconic Troubadour—the party parade was in fully emancipated swing.

From the arrival call of **Johnny Bones**' saxophone to the high-pitched "do-do-do"s of singer/guitarist/trumpeter **Lech Wierzynski**, the crowd's hips swayed in the jam-packed house as they sang every word of "When It Was Wrong," from 2015's *A River's Invitation*. During a sweaty first set filled with slinky bass and New Orleans second-line grease, the gregarious band soothed all the way down, walking on Wilson Pickett's "Don't Let the Green Grass Fool You," into Champion Jack Dupree's "Junker's Blues," the latter causing a smiling Wierzynski to pause during the ironic applause for the tune's cautionary tale.

That's the charming spell of a Honeydrops experience. Whether it was the frisky innuendo of "Pumpkin Pie," which temporarily moved drummer **Ben Malament** to washboard, keyboardist **Lorenzo Loera** to bass and bassist **Beau Bradbury** to drums, or the extended romp of a nearly 20-minute homage to Rebirth Brass Band's "Do Whatcha Wanna" that closed the 75-minute first half, everything seemed all right.

Between sets, the band mingled among the tightly packed crowd, then returned to shoot 'em up on the slow soul of The Intruders' "Cowboys to Girls," with Loera taking the lead vocal. A rhythm-and-blues harbinger, the lost classic kicked off a mooth-grooving, cover-heavy second half, with the band admitting that current work on their next record has left them yearning to play anyone's music but their own. Eddie Floyd's "I've Never Found a Girl (To Love Me Like You Do)" and The Coasters' "Let's Go Get Stoned" were mixed in with an Allen Toussaint instrumental and Ray Charles' "Drown in My Own Tears," offset by the peppy band original "Crazy Girls."

"The show's over," Wierzynski said with a wink, following a marathon run through both parts of "Brokedown." "What happens next shouldn't be considered part of it." Then, after three and a half hours—and wishing everyone happiness during an off-the-record, reggae-flecked impromptu encore—the festivities came to a close.

The California Honeydrops may embrace and encourage their role as a party band, but in light of such an elastic and almost encyclopedic performance, the description falls short. Wierzynski, a rare gem of a singer, is certainly an unrelenting showman. He's also one of five in an ensemble of revitalizing depth, owning the ability to preserve and present musical history with captivating style and respectful adoration. ***Larson Sutton***

Ethan Shvartzman

THE 2017 RELIX FESTIVAL GUIDE: SET I

COMPILED BY ROB SLATER

The times, they certainly are a changin' and, in a world filled with so much uncertainty, it's nice to hold on to some of our favorite traditions. So, with that in mind, we are particularly excited to present the first installment of our 17th annual Festival Guide. Our "first set" kicks off in early March, in time for Spring Break, and continues through the second weekend of Coachella. We'll continue to preview the best of this year's fests and destination events throughout our 2017 issues and online at www.relix.com/festivals.

Lineups are up-to-date as of press time. If you see an (R) next to a listing, then be sure to visit our Relix booth onsite.

R Okeechobee Music & Arts Festival
3/2-5 // Okeechobee, FL
Kings of Leon, Usher & The Roots, Bassnectar, The Lumineers, Flume, Wiz Khalifa, Sturgill Simpson, Solange, Anderson .Paak & The Free Nationals, GRiZ, Bleachers, The Revivalists, Mac DeMarco, Sleigh Bells, Moon Taxi, Vulfpeck, George Clinton and Parliament Funkadelic, more
okeechobeefest.com

McDowell Mountain Music Festival
3/3-5 // Phoenix, AZ
Flume, The Shins, Chromeo, Grouplove, Gov't Mule, Lettuce, DJ Mustard, Emancipator Ensemble, Bob Moses, Railroad Earth, The Record Company, Turkuaz, more
mmmf.com

CRSSD Festival
3/4-5 // San Diego, CA
Flume, Blood Orange, Bob Moses, Snakehips, Jackmaster, Cut Snake, Duke Dumont, AlunaGeorge, more
crssdfest.com

Savannah Stopover Music Festival
3/9-11 // Savannah, GA
Kishi Bashi, Lee Fields & The Expressions, Julien Baker, Lewis Del Mar, JEFF the Brotherhood, Ezra Furman, Caveman, A Tribe Called Red, Ruby Amanfu, more
savannahstopover.com

BUKU Music & Art Project
3/10-11 // New Orleans, LA
deadmau5, Travis Scott, GRiZMatik, Run the Jewels, Zeds Dead, Tycho, Young Thug, ZHU, Vince Staples, Sleigh Bells, Lil Dicky, Cashmere Cat, Washed Out, Lil Yachty, Thundercat, The Floozies, more
thebukuproject.com

Orlando Jazz Festival
3/10-11 // Orlando, FL
Boney James, Marc Antoine, David Sanborn, Norman Brown, Jeff Lorber, Alex Bugnon, Ken Ford, Paul Taylor, Rick Braun, Marion Meadows, more
orlandojazzfest.com

Jungle Jam
3/10-12 // Jaco, Costa Rica
Slightly Stoopid, Thievery Corporation, Stick Figure, Twiddle, Fortunate Youth, Mike Love, Zach Deputy, Ryan Montbleau, more
junglejam.com

Gasparilla Music Festival
3/11-12 // Tampa, FL
Cage the Elephant, Ryan Adams, Ghostface Killah, Moon Taxi, Dirty Dozen Brass Band, The New Mastersounds, The Marcus King Band, more
gasparillamusic.com

Golden Plains
3/11-13 // Meredith, Australia
Neil Finn, The Specials, Nicolas Jaar, Kurt Vile, Margaret Glaspy, Chain & The Gang, The Damned, Princess Nokia, more
goldenplains.com.au

South by Southwest
3/13-19 // Austin, TX

Big Ears Festival

The Band of Heathens, Beach Slang, San Fermin, Robyn Hitchcock, Pegi Young, Spoon, Kate Nash, Malcolm London, more
sxsw.com

Pot of Gold Music Festival
3/17-18 // Chandler, AZ
G-Eazy, Flogging Molly, Death Cab for Cutie, Sublime with Rome, Fitz & The Tantrums, 311, Matisyahu, NOFX, Rae Sremmurd, more
potofgoldaz.com

Musink
3/17-19 // Costa Mesa, CA
NOFX, The Vandals, Goldfinger, The Used, Glassjaw, Pennywise, Bad Religion, more
musinkfest.com

Starry Nites Festival
3/18-19 // Santa Barbara, CA
Alan Parsons Live Project, The Kills, Cat Power, The Dandy Warhols, She Wants Revenge, Black Mountain, Teenage Fanclub, The Strawberry Alarm Clock, more
starrynitesfestival.com

Vive Latino
3/18-19 // Mexico City, Mexico
Babasónicos, G-Eazy, Prophets of Rage, Rancid, Jake Bugg, Foxygen, The Pretty Reckless, Enanitos Verdes, Justice, Hombres G, Julieta Venegas, more
vivelatino.com.mx

Treefort Music Fest
3/22-26 // Boise, ID
The Infamous Stringdusters, Meat Puppets, Mac DeMarco, Jonathan Richman, Marco Benevento, Delicate Steve, Lizzo, Kate Tempest, STRFKR, more
treefortmusicfest.com

Estereo Picnic
3/23-25 // Bogotá, Colombia
The Strokes, The Weeknd, deadmau5, Flume, The xx, Justice, Cage the Elephant, Wiz Khalifa, Two Door Cinema Club, Caribou, Silversun Pickups, Vance Joy, more
festivalestereopicnic.com

Head for the Hills Music & Arts Festival
3/23-25 // New Braunfels, TX
Kyle Hollingsworth Band, Ozrics, Spafford, Randy & Mr. Lahey's Cheeseburger Picnic, A Live One, Calliope Musicals, The Cream Cheese Accident, more
headforthehillsfest.com

Suwannee Spring Reunion
3/23-25 // Live Oak, FL
Donna the Buffalo, Jerry Douglas Presents Earls of Leicester, Peter Rowan Band, Jim Lauderdale, Verlon Thompson, Jeff Mosier with Pickled Holler, Quartermoon, more
suwanneespringreunion.com

Big Ears Festival
3/23-26 // Knoxville, TN
Wilco, Tortoise, Dave Harrington Group, The Magnetic Fields, cup (Nels Cline & Yuka C. Honda), Glenn Kotche, Xylouris White, Joan Shelley, Xiu Xiu, more
bigearsfestival.com

Savannah Music Festival
3/23- 4/8 // Savannah, GA
The Avett Brothers, Jason Isbell, Bruce Hornsby & The Noisemakers, Grateful Ball feat. Travelin' McCourys & Jeff Austin Band, Richard Thompson/ Sarah Jarosz, more
savannahmusicfestival.org

Ultra Music Festival
3/24-26 // Miami, FL
Ice Cube, Justice, Major Lazer, The Prodigy, Underworld, Afrojack, David Guetta, Tiesto, Steve Aoki, more
ultramusicfestival.com

Lollapalooza Brazil
3/25-26 // São Paolo, Brazil
Metallica, The Strokes, The Weeknd, The xx, The Chainsmokers, Flume, Duran Duran, The 1975, Tove Lo, Cage the Elephant, Silversun Pickups, Jimmy Eat World, more
lollapalloozabr.com

Fool's Paradise
3/31- 4/1 // St. Augustine, FL
Lettuce, Joe Russo's Almost Dead, The Floozies, Manic Science, The Main Squeeze, Oteil Burbridge, more
foolsparadisefl.com

Lollapalooza Argentina
3/31- 4/1 // Buenos Aires, Argentina
Metallica, The Strokes, The Weeknd, The xx, The Chainsmokers, Flume, Duran Duran, The 1975, Tove Lo, Cage the Elephant, Silversun Pickups, Jimmy Eat World, more
lollapaloozaar.com

Pa'l Norte
3/31-4/1 // Monterrey, Mexico
The Killers, Maná, Placebo, M.I.A., The Offspring, Kaskade, Nicolas Jaar, Jason Derulo, Enanitos Verdes, Mike Posner, more
palnorte.com.mx

WinterWonderGrass Tahoe
3/31-4/2 // Squaw Valley, CA
Greensky Bluegrass, Yonder Mountain String Band, Leftover Salmon, The Infamous Stringdusters, Sam Bush Band, Peter Rowan, Hot Buttered Rum, Fruition, more
winterwondergrasstahoe.com

Lollapalooza Chile
4/1-2 // Santiago, Chile
Metallica, The Strokes, The Weeknd, The xx, The Chainsmokers, Flume, Duran Duran, The 1975, Tove Lo, Cage the Elephant, Silversun Pickups, Jimmy Eat World, more
lollapaloozacl.com

Country Thunder Music Festival
4/6-9 // Florence, AZ
Blake Shelton, Dierks Bentley, Thomas Rhett, Chris Young, Tyler Farr, Maddie & Tae, Joe Nichols, more
countrythunder.com/festivals/florence-az

Euphoria Music & Camping Festival
4/6-9 // Austin, TX
The Disco Biscuits, The Floozies, Alesso, Chromeo, Pretty Lights Live, Wiz Khalifa, Young Thug, Zeds Dead, more
euphoriafest.com

Rhythm N' Blooms Music Festival
4/7-9 // Knoxville, TN
Young the Giant, Gogol Bordello, Dave Barnes, John Paul White, Cruz Contreras, Aaron Lee Tasjan, Parker Millsap, John Moreland, more
rhythmnbloomsfest.com

Tortuga Music Festival
4/7-9 // Fort Lauderdale, FL
Kenny Chesney, Luke Bryan, Chris Stapleton, Alan Jackson, Darius Rucker, Brett Eldredge, Dustin Lynch, Slightly Stoopid, more
tortugamusicfestival.com

Byron Bay Bluesfest
4/13-17 // Byron Bay, Australia
Patti Smith, Santana, Mavis Staples, Zac Brown Band, Jimmy Buffett, The Lumineers, Bonnie Raitt, The Doobie Brothers, Buddy Guy, Courtney Barnett, Jethro Tull, more
bluesfest.com.au

Coachella Valley Music & Arts Festival
4/14-16 & 4/21-23 // Indio, CA
Radiohead, Beyoncé, Kendrick Lamar, Lorde, Bon Iver, The xx, Father John Misty, Empire of the Sun, Mac DeMarco, Future Islands, The Head and the Heart, Phantogram, Hans Zimmer, more
coachella.com

MICHAEL WEINTROB'S *INSTRUMENTHEAD*

Michael Weintrob's *INSTRUMENTHEAD* book draws on a collection of special images that he's created over the years. In this series, the photographer has shot over 400 individual musicians with their faces obscured by the tools of their trade. As he explains, with each shoot, he asks the artist: "How are we going to tell your story? How will people know that it is you without seeing your face? What is it about you that makes you special?" Here are some of the results. To learn more about the project and to purchase the book, visit: **instrumentheadbook.com.**

Scott Avett

I met Scott Avett at the Newport Folk Festival in 2008 when I was a house photographer there. I was standing backstage, close to the stairs next to the stage. I approached Scott and showed him some of my "INSTRUMENTHEAD" portraits on my iPhone. He told me if we could ever find an opportunity to shoot that, then he would like to participate. I had the opportunity to set up a studio a couple of years later at the Suwannee Springfest. We shot some solo portraits and then did the "INSTRUMENTHEAD." This image is really special in the grand scope of my project because of how recognizable Scott's banjo is with its red painted flowers on the banjo head.

John Popper

After John played Brooklyn Bowl one night, we went back to my studio to do the "INSTRUMENTHEAD" shoot. It has always been a struggle for me to photograph musicians with smaller instruments for this project. We decided to hang John's harmonica case and open it– this way you would be able to see his many harmonicas and the case. I attached John's hat that he always wears to the top of the case, and he is holding his cane that he always travels with.

Mickey Hart

I arrived at Mickey Hart's house after learning five minutes earlier that my cousin had passed away. It was hard to connect with him, but once I let him know about the tragedy I was dealing with, he agreed to do whatever I wanted for the shoot. I buried him in drum sticks like you would bury someone in the sand, and I shot portraits of him with his wife and daughter. Then we headed into his music room. He started playing drums for me while I moved lights around and took his photograph. I saw an empty kit next to him. I can keep a four-beat on the drums and thought to myself, "What the hell?" I sat down at the kit and we had a jam until there was nothing left to do because all I could play was that four-beat. My cousin, who passed away, left behind a husband and two children. Her husband was an old Deadhead and Mickey signed a drum head to them that said, "To Andy, Sam and Annie: Onward, Mickey Hart, Grateful Dead."

Alam Khan

I shot this portrait of Alam at the Ali Akbar College in San Rafael, Calif. Alam's father, Ali Akbar Khan, was one of the foremost Indian musicians in the world. This image is a tribute to his father. Alam has a sarod over his face, which is the instrument both he and his father play. Alam is sitting with a sculpture of his father's head in his lap surrounded by beautiful flowers.

Binky Griptite

Binky is the musical director for Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings. His name is Binky, and that is why there is a binky—another name for a pacifier—hanging from his guitar. He is gripping his record tight for "Griptite." He is wearing a crown on top of his head because he is a Dap-King.

Susan Tedeschi & Derek Trucks

This image is really special to me. The first time I ever shot an "INSTRUMENTHEAD" was backstage at the Aggie Theatre [in Colorado] in 2000. It was a portrait of the Derek Trucks Band. Todd Smallie, his bassist, put his bass down his shirt for the portrait shoot. That was the first time I had ever shot a portrait like this. Nine years later, Derek and Susan agreed to work with me for this project. This image is my take on the "American Gothic" portrait of the farmer and his wife. You can see Susan on the left with a '59 Les Paul holding a microphone, and Derek on the right with his Gibson SG, with all of the signatures on it, holding a slide on his finger.

Tina Weymouth

I grew up a huge Talking Heads fan. I had met Chris [Frantz] and Tina years before this shoot when they were performing with their band the Tom Tom Club. When we were shooting portraits of the two of them together, we were listening to Fred Astaire on the stereo. It set the tone for a beautiful shoot. Tina was such a joy to work with. Afterward, we went out for a great Italian meal in Brooklyn.

Peaches Staten

Peaches is a blues singer in Chicago. I was having an exhibit in Chicago, where I had a studio set up during the day to photograph local musicians. I wanted to try to tell her story through the image. She sometimes wears a head wrap while she performs. We decided to hang the washboard so she could stand in front of it. I wrapped her head wrap around the top of the board. In the image, she is wearing peach-colored clothes and actually throwing peaches in the air. We tried the throwing shot a number of times before we got it perfect.

Anders Osborne

I had Anders over to my Nashville studio when he was in town playing City Winery. I knew about Anders' guitar called Blackie, and his love of butterflies. He has stickers of butterflies on his guitar, as well as tattoos of butterflies on his body. To prepare for the shoot, I ordered a bunch of fake butterflies on the internet. When Anders arrived for the shoot, I had already prepared a bunch of hanging butterflies for him to pose with in the photo. He saw them when he walked in and cracked the biggest smile, and it set the mood for the shoot.

TRUE TALES OF "HAUNTING RENDITIONS"

Toeing the line between stand-up and absurdity

BY ELIOT GLAZER

It's well known that a lot of comedians want to be musicians, and a lot of musicians want to be comedians. That's why you see people like John Mayer, Erykah Badu and Michael Bublé dipping their toes into comedic waters. I hatched the idea for "Haunting Renditions" with Seth Keim, who's a producer for *Jimmy Fallon* and has been my friend since high school. I wanted to do something in the realm of musical comedy because I'd done stand-up, storytelling and improv, but I'm also really into music and initially went to school on an opera scholarship. But I didn't know how to infuse that into my comedy—all these musical comedy shows kept falling into the same realm, which was a ukulele, piano or guitar, and then silly lyrics that were double entendres.

We started the show as a Web series passion project where we were basically doing an *Austin City Limits* or *MTV Unplugged* parody with really lowbrow songs. Though it was never the goal, we got a little bit of traction, so I decided to try it out live. We collected a bunch of musicians and came up with the format of the show two-and-a-half years ago at Union Hall in Brooklyn, before moving to Littlefield and The Bell ouse. I live in L.A. now, so we'll also do it at The Echo or at festivals throughout the year.

I was in an a cappella group in college, which has more bearing on "Haunting Renditions" than anything else, especially considering that my pianist and bandleader was the musical director of our a cappella troupe. That's where the aesthetic for the show comes from—our friendship and our history doing a cappella. I was always trying to inject levels of humor into the show that didn't really work for a college a cappella group but, at the very least, pushed the limits of what we performed and how we performed a little bit more. We've had a cross-section of guests. I've done duets with Ed Droste from Grizzly Bear and the drag queen Milk, who was on *RuPaul's Drag Race*. We've had Abbi Jacobson re-emerge as her alter ego Val from *Broad City* to sing, and I even did "The 12 Days of Christmas" based on 2016 with Gilbert Gottfried. It's wacky and strange, but it gives someone like Ed—who you'd think is a real quiet, thoughtful, wallfl wer type—a chance to tickle the funny bone. He's actually really outgoing and fun. And it's fun for me because it's a chance to live out my other dream of being a musician and sort of play both roles.

I like to think that it toes the line between stand-up and absurdity. My favorite takeaway from the show is when people tell me that they were confused—that they weren't sure how to respond. Someone might say, "You made me tear up while you were singing Katy Perry," and I love that. It's such a great form of comedy because it falls somewhere between parody, absurdism, fandom and a regular, straight-up concert. Reggie Watts once explained the term "disinformation" to me, and that informs a lot of his act. It's an intellectual, philosophical practice where you're filling the ether with content that isn't actually content, and this is an outpouring of that idea. It makes the audience listen a little closer. For me, that's such an elevated way of performing.

We tend to do a lot of '90s songs and laugh at how they had this air of self-seriousness that had a big hold on culture at that time. People in their 20s to 40s are really obsessed with nostalgia, even if it's very recent history. When I was a teenager in the '90s, music had such a visceral effect on our life and was an integral part of your personality. Whether you were a slacker, slinger or any of those cultural niches that were so focused on identity, music helped identify who you were—grunge, the idea of sellouts and this reimagining of pop stars. That's what makes those '90s songs so easy to lampoon—we are poking fun at ourselves and who we were, not just waxing nostalgic.

I personally fell into that momentary jamband phase—Dave Matthews Band, Guster, Sublime, even Barenaked Ladies. We recently added "Ants Marching" to our set—it is just so self-aggrandizing. The lyrics are kitschy spiritual, and once you actually stop and listen to the lyrics, you remember how Dave Matthews Band, Phish, Hootie & The Blowfish and Gu ter really gave Caucasian guys a chance to act like they were deep. It's funny to look back on these moments. I went to Lilith Fair when I was 16 and I loved every minute of it, but it was so self-congratulatory and straight-up goofy to be so taken with yourself—to be taken with how deep you thought you were.

In the '90s, music gave people a chance to form an identity based around their tastes. When I was growing up, stores at the mall would sell specific me chandise based on Korn or Limp Bizkit that let you identify as a pissed-off teenager, raging against the machine. It was so potent, and I don't think that's true of teenagers anymore. So it's very easy to lambaste because, when you become an adult, you realize that you don't want to be defined y the fact that you listen to Rusted Root. You want to be defined y more than that.

Eliot Glazer is an executive story editor on New Girl*, has written for* Younger *and recently developed an original half-hour comedy produced by Will Arnett for Comedy Central. He can be seen in a recurring role on* Broad City*, where he also serves as a creative consultant.*

CLAUDE HUDSON "BUTCH" TRUCKS

(MAY 11, 1947–JAN. 24, 2017)

A final enco e for the Allman Brothers' co-founder and career-spanning drummer and mouthpiece BY ALAN PAUL

YOU KNOW BUTCH

Trucks better than you think you do, even if you never met the man. His personality was in every bar of every song that the Allman Brothers Band ever played: hard charging, exuberant, soulful, intelligent, no-nonsense, cocky, determined, proud, earthy, cerebral and soulful.

Trucks could, as producer Tom Dowd once noted, simultaneously play rhythm, harmony and melody; his playing was incredibly musical. His fills and drum parts became signature parts of songs, as defining as a y guitar riff, bassline or vocal.

Butch remained an incredibly powerful drummer until the end, as anyone who saw his Freight Train Band or Les Brers, which featured fi e former members of the Allman Brothers Band, can attest. I was on the road with Les Brers last fall, when they played several excellent shows. I experienced profound joy standing alongside the reunited Allman Brothers backline of Butch, Jaimoe and Marc Quiñones. It was like coming home to something very special—a physical sensation that I felt deep in my bones and couldn't have known I missed so much until I felt it again. I wish everyone could have had the experience of watching an Allman Brothers show from side stage, next to this percussion powerhouse. It was an overwhelming experience that helped you understand the deep impact the drummers had on the music's greatness.

I interviewed Butch quite a few times from 1990–2011, but our relationship was strictly professional until I received an email from him out of the blue. He had read an excerpt of my memoir, *Big in China*, and was

Dino Perrucci

so fascinated by my story about playing blues in Beijing and turning my Chinese bandmates onto the music of the Allman Brothers that he tracked me down. I was surprised and flatte ed and offe ed to send him a copy of the book, but he had already ordered one and said he'd call after he read it—and he actually followed through with his promise.

Our friendship quickly deepened and, suddenly, we were plotting ways to go to China together—a trip that sadly never happened. Butch was an indispensable resource throughout the writing of *One Way Out*: *The Inside History of The Allman Brothers Band*; he answered my phone calls and emails consistently and quickly and was always ready to share an opinion or memory. He also immediately agreed to write a foreword and, almost as quickly, wrote it by himself, and it ran with very little editing. That's not how celebrity forewords usually happen, but little about Butch Trucks was usual.

Butch was irascible. He could be grumpy. Everyone who had an extended relationship with him, including me, eventually endured some big fight . They always passed, and most of them were driven by Butch's passion, his honesty and his refusal to say the expedient or polite thing if it clashed with his actual opinion. Butch was particularly quick to push back against any perceived slight against the Allman Brothers Band's legacy because he was truly the band's biggest fan. He spent the 45 years between Duane Allman's death and his own as his friend's most passionate apostle, telling anyone who would listen how brilliant Duane was and how he changed the lives of everyone who came in contact with him. Some people rolled their eyes at Butch's berating of the Grateful Dead, The Rolling Stones and The Who, but I viewed it as proud defiance at the very concept that anyone else should claim the title of "World's Greatest Rock Band." He was fie cely loyal. When Lynyrd Skynyrd's Ed King criticized Tom Dowd, who produced both bands, Butch used his excellent blog to attack King and defend the man everyone always considered the seventh Allman Brother. You wanted Butch to have your back.

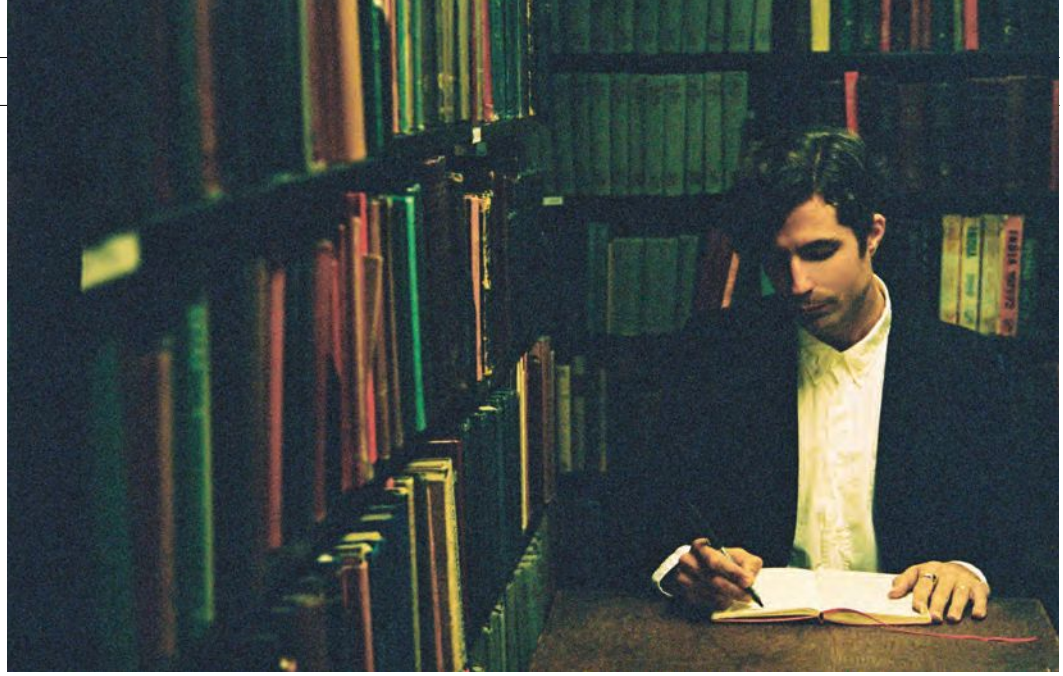
Butch was very bright, well versed in philosophy, astronomy, politics, history, college football, classical music, fishing and ma y other things—all of which he delighted in discussing. In March 2015, we spent a lot of time together one weekend as I drove him around to several events, while we talked in depth about anything and everything. He came to my house for breakfast with my family in great spirits and was extremely kind and gracious to my wife and children. He also engaged my uncle Ben, a Dartmouth grad and retired judge, in an in-depth conversation about their shared passions for philosophy and physics that left Ben a bit stunned. Later that afternoon, we sat for a talk together at my local bookstore and the store's owner had a similar reaction, saying that Butch was his favorite guest ever—and the store has hosted dozens of literary stars.

Over the last four years, Butch established a wonderful, warm family vibe at his Roots Rock Revival Camp near Woodstock, N.Y. It was his baby, and his core counselors were Oteil Burbridge, Luther Dickinson and Cody Dickinson, supported by a rotating crop of guest musicians. Butch was at the center of an expanding, fie cely loyal band of brothers and sisters who attended each year and stayed in close touch. They will miss his magnetic presence tremendously, but I'm certain that his musical passion will continue to shine through them all for many years to come.

The world feels a lot quieter, a lot smaller and a lot more boring. It's hard to believe that I'll never see Butch again, that I'll never hear his booming voice or hard-hitting, swinging drumming again—never again see him and Jaimoe playing together or whispering in one another's ears. It's hard to accept that the pipe dream of one more Allman Brothers Band reunion is over. It's hard to accept a world without Butch.

Alan Paul is the author of the definitive llman Brothers Band biography, One Way Out.

5 ARTISTS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT



Amanda Charchian (Entrance)

Entrance LOS ANGELES

A DIFFERENT DOOR OF PERCEPTION

Songwriter **Guy Blakeslee** calls his **Entrance** moniker his "second name," and his new LP, *Book of Changes*, a "rebirth." A shift away from the group-oriented rock-and-roll of The Entrance Band and the psychedelic blues of previous albums like *Prayer of Death*, the album finds Bla eslee exploring folk and florid chambe -pop, while bringing a newfound lyrical focus to the forefront. Recorded in spurts in London and Los Angeles during a year of travel, Blakeslee says there's a theme of change running through the songs. "Changing perspectives, changing location, changes that are beyond our control—they're all kind of woven in there," he says. The songs were borne out of a new writing process in which Blakeslee started each morning with a coffee or tea and f ee-wrote three pages of his thoughts, without any editing or analysis allowed in the moment. "A lot of the lyrics and ideas came from that process," he says. Loosely conceptual in nature, the record revels in contrasts, segueing from the ambient loops of "Warm and Wild" to the pop charms of "Always the Right Time," from the longing ballad "Leaving California" to the anthemic, rocking "Revolution Eyes." His songs aim to transcend the particular and achieve a kind of universality. Though lushly arranged on the record, many of the compositions were created in a solo setting, with just Blakeslee on guitar, attempting to tap into the simplicity and directness of folk music and bypassing "the noise and clutter" of modernity. "I have a chance to reach people in a diffe ent way," he says.

entrancelives.com *Jason Woodbury*

Mt. Joy PHILADELPHIA/LOS ANGELES

SOUNDS & SPACES

Mt. Joy's story is similar to that of countless other indie rockers. Two buddies, **Matt Quinn** and **Sam Cooper**, started making music together in high school, lost contact when college intervened and then reconnected thereafter. Weaned on Dylan, the Dead, The Beatles, the Stones and Neil Young, before discovering Alabama Shakes, My Morning Jacket, Fleet Foxes and The Shins, Mt. Joy mined their influences to c eate *Astrovan*, their debut EP, which boasts four deliriously dreamy songs reflecting a kn wing attitude all their own. Cooper was practicing law and Quinn was in law school, but they both quickly realized music was their true calling. The goal, Quinn says, "was to dig us out of jobs and career paths that provided for us economically, but weren't making us happy." Cooper adds, "When 'Astrovan' started gaining traction on Spotify, it felt like the universe was telling us to ditch the legal thing. So I quit my job and Matt dropped out of law school, and we started pursuing music instead." Borrowing their name from a mountain in Valley Forge National Park, located near their hometown of Philadelphia, Mt. Joy are now gearing up for an initial series of shows, with a full-length effort to foll w. "Mt. Joy is evolving," Quinn says. "It draws from our influence , while trying to push for cool sounds and sonic spaces. We can't wait to share it."

mtjoyband.com *Lee Zimmerman*

Once & Future Band OAKLAND, CALIF.

EAST BAY FUSION

The members of **Once & Future Band**—drummer **Raj Ojha**, keyboardist **Joel Robinow**, guitarist **Raze Regal** and bassist **Eli Eckert**—have played together in many combinations, including in Howlin Rain, the hard-rock outfit Drunk orse and a handful of satirical cover bands. (Those include: Total B.S., a Bob Seger tribute and Casual BJ, their twist on Billy Joel hits.) So the name fit .

Their debut LP fuses pop, prog, glam, psych, art rock and jazz sounds with complex song structures honed over fi e years, built on a '90s acid-jazz model with "improvisational tendencies" and tight production. Robinow and Eckert are the lead songwriters, though Eckert says the project started as a vehicle to air the work of the prolific obinow. Regal, newly aboard, was drawn to the band's wit—that they were tapping influences li e Harry Nilsson and Curtis Mayfield, but also Burt Bacharach and Gilbert & Sullivan. The results are dark and playful heartsick songs about, as Robinow says, "sad, pathetic men."

"A big part of our sound, for me," Eckert says, "is the way that jazz was sampled in the hip-hop records of the '90s, and how they would take a small piece of a song and create a mood...It's not obvious by listening to this music, but that's definitely part of our sound."

Robinow describes the process of constructing rock songs from this vast sonic palette as akin to hip-hop in it's a "great equalizer." "You've got easy listening next to John Coltrane. No one was disinvited to the table. 'OK, cool—that Lawrence Welk sample works 'cause it sounds good, or that Dorothy Ashby works because it sounds good.' There's no real hierarchy."

onceandfutureband.com

Richard B. Simon

Naughty Professor NEW ORLEANS

CRESCENT CITY IDENTITIES

Naughty Professor is the distillation of New Orleans' eclectic and disparate musical neighborhoods, with influence as wide-ranging as modern hip-hop titan Kendrick Lamar, local Frenchmen Street musicians and jazz-fusion outfi Kneebody. The sextet—whose instrumentation includes two saxophones, one trumpet and a bass-drums-guitar rhythm trio—mashes funk, jazz and hip-hop influences with ps chedelia that moves, swirls and breathes. Their recent live record, *In the Flesh*, is a snapshot of Naughty Professor's current chops and energetic stage show, and they recently finished a new full length studio album, *Identity*, which features appearances by Chali 2na, The Revivalists' David Shaw, Ivan Neville, Lettuce's Eric "Benny" Bloom, Mike Dillon and members of The Soul Rebels. Their Chali 2na collaboration, "Darker Daze," is a politically charged number that captures the fear of a Donald Trump America. And while appearances at New Orleans Jazz Fest and their adventurous headlining shows are indicative of an upward ascent, drummer **Sam Shahin** says, "We're still a very hungry band with fresh ideas looking for that break," and that break doesn't seem to be too far away at this point.

naughtyprofessormusic.com

Kirsten Cohen (The Lil' Smokies)

The Lil' Smokies MISSOULA, MONT.

NEW TWISTS ON OLD IDEAS

The Lil' Smokies' origins date back to 2008 when the group's members met at a University of Montana party and stayed up all night pickin' standards. "I was in a creative writing program that I never quite finished after meeting the boys," says **Andy Dunnigan**, the band's dobroist, vocalist and primary songwriter. At fir t, the ensemble only played cover songs in bars around Missoula—they became The Lil' Smokies after devouring a plate of mini cocktail links in the green room at a show. Come 2013, the group began performing originals, entering the Northwest String Summit Band Competition that same year and taking home a win; in 2015, they won the Telluride Bluegrass Festival contest, and, this winter, they will spend time on the road opening for Yonder Mountain String Band. Although the instrumentation is classic bluegrass, the band's sound incorporates pop, jam elements and Crosby, Stills & Nash-inspired harmonies. "Greensky Bluegrass, Infamous Stringdusters, Punch Brothers—we're all doing new twists on an old idea, as far as bluegrass goes," says Dunnigan. The quintet is working on its second studio album, but the live show is what has continued to propel them. "There's a rawness to our live performances and there's a risk factor," says Dunnigan. "We're having a lot of fun right now." **thelilsmokies.com**

Kiran Herbert

GROUP AT WORK

Sinkane

Livin' It

It's the afternoon before Donald Trump's inauguration and just a few days after the death of enigmatic Nigerian musician William Onyeabor, and Ahmed Gallab is hunkered down in a Brooklyn practice space. Gallab—who performs under the name Sinkane and played drums with the band Yeasayer for a stretch—has traveled the world working with giants like Damon Albarn and Pharoah Sanders, leading a band playing Onyeabor's music.

That project gave Gallab a sense of something "larger than life" in the music. "I wanted to rein that energy back into my music," he says. With Sinkane, which is now a six-piece band, Gallab makes big, jubilant dance-ready music that celebrates optimism and endurance, embracing positivity as a force to harness and channel into the world.

Gallab, 33, grew up in Utah and Ohio, but he was born in London to parents who had been exiled from Sudan during the country's political upheaval. "I know the impact of a corrupt government because it's happened to me," he says. Gallab sees music as the creative expression of hope, agency and identity, even for the uprooted. "If I don't take control, I might never make it home," goes the refrain on the slinky "Passenger," from Sinkane's new album, *Life & Livin' It*.

Gallab writes about identity and finding one's place, things he struggled with in his youth. "It's a call to people who are similar to me," he says. "For us displaced people, there is a home comprised of all our collective homes."

The record is driven by his familiarity with global dance music, soul, reggae, Tropicália and suave post-punk-inflected pop. Gallab says Sudanese music seeped into his sensibility during his childhood, even if he didn't like the stuff then.

"As a young, rebellious kid, that was the last thing I wanted to hear," he says. But it became "ingrained" in his psyche. "U'Huh" is a feel-good groove—with ecstatic horn stabs—that seems made for the moment. "We're all gonna be all right," repeats one line, in defiant, uplifting confidence. As Gallab says, "I feel like a lot of people need a positive, bright and lively energy in these trying times."

John Adamian

MAN AT WORK

Joey Alexander Piano Prodigy

At 13 years old, Joey Alexander has already released two jazz albums, toured major festivals around the world, met his musical idols, played at the White House, joined Wynton Marsalis for a performance, hosted a residency at Jazz at Lincoln Center and received two Grammy nominations.

"I don't think I'm that busy—as a musician, I'm having a normal life," the pianist says from his hotel room before a gig at California's Mondavi Center with the Joey Alexander Trio (while adding that he does his schoolwork online). "We tour and we play and we fl . As musicians, we do that to play for the people—it's normal to us."

The Indonesian wunderkind started teaching himself to play piano at 6 with a mini electronic keyboard at home, learning Thelonious Monk songs by ear, and then began performing for audiences when he was 8 years old.

"There was one guy who would call me to play jam sessions with him," Alexander says, mentioning that he grew up on the music of his home country of Bali as well as other forms of jazz. "Sometimes, my family and I would tour around with [mentor Indra Lesmana, a popular Indonesian jazz pianist] playing, and that's how I learned the music."

He also learned the fundamentals from his father, who "taught me some piano and basic chords and loves music," Alexander says, adding that they listened to a lot of definitive jazz records together. "I love classical and gospel and a lot of musicians, not just jazz—Michael Jackson, Aretha Franklin, Debussy. I love James Brown. I listen to all of that."

Alexander and his parents now live in New York City but, he says, "I still feel that Indonesia is my home because I have family there, too." When he's not touring, he enjoys more traditional 13-year-old activities like watching movies, swimming, playing games, playing with action figures, and, of course, practicing piano.

For his latest release, the nine-track *Countdown* (Motema), Alexander offers impressive original compositions as well as fresh takes on several covers. "The best part of it was making music with great musicians. I'm so thankful to them, and that's a fun thing for me—just making the music—and every song is my favorite," he says of the recording process.

"I was grateful to God that I had a positive response on my fir t album [2015's *My Favorite Things*]. For me, I want people to feel the joy of this music and I want to be a good force for the people. That's the most important thing to me as a musician, and to always have fun," Alexander says. "Every moment is special to me; every place and venue I go, I always have fun every time; and every person I get to meet is interesting and I learn a lot about music." ***Amy Jacques***

Adam Tetzloff (Sinkane); Carol Friedman (Alexander)

CHICANO BATMAN

BY DEAN BUDNICK

"BARDO, OUR singer, was at a party one day and he was doodling," explains Chicano Batman guitarist Carlos Arévalo as he details the origins of the band's name, which also encapsulates the group's musical mission statement. "He drew a little Batman-looking guy, but it looked like him: It had a little mustache and a little goatee. Instead of the cape, he drew a flannel, which is something that a Chicano would wear in LA. So that was it: Chicano Batman. And, obviously, you're taking these two ideas—a pop culture symbol and a social-political symbol and combining them. As we progress as a group, it really represents who we are more and more because we're representing our culture and diversity on platforms that people don't often have the opportunities to reach. We're making waves in a positive direction."

The group is certainly reaching more sizable audiences than it did when it fir t came together back in 2008, performing a blend of Brazilian Tropicália psychedelic protest music and Latin American soul. Chicano Batman have opened arena gigs for Jack White, shared tour dates with Alabama Shakes and performed at Coachella. Last June, they even kicked off Bonna oo's Which Stage on Saturday afternoon. The Bonnaroo gig carried a particular challenge since the sun was bearing down on the quartet as they appeared in their customary dapper attire: tuxedo shirts and matching jackets.

As Arévalo looks back on the Bonnaroo experience, he shares insight into the band's aesthetic: "We do sometimes have that moment where, due to climate reasons, we're like, 'Should we go full regalia this time? It's pretty warm.' But, every time, we decide that it's part of the show, and part of the identity of the band is to pay homage to some of our favorite groups of the past. You look at Curtis Mayfield and The Impressions and The Temptations, or a group like Los Pasteles Verdes, or Los Ángeles Negros from South America, and they were wearing those ruffled shirt with the bowties and the vests and the full suits, and they would show up and give it everything. That's what we're trying to tap into, just trying to carry on that tradition."

Freedom Is Free, Chicano Batman's third full-length and fir t release on ATO Records, continues to build on those sounds. The group enlisted Leon Michels, who has performed with Sharon Jones & The Dap-Kings, The Black Keys and the Menahan Street Band, to produce the album. Michels tracked the sessions to analog tape at his Diamond Mine Recording studio in Long Island City, N.Y., successfully capturing the spirited live energy of Arévalo, frontman/keyboard player Bardo Martinez, bassist Eduardo Arenas and drummer Gabriel Villa. Michels also brightened the vocal palette with the addition of Flor de Toloache, New York City's fir t all-female mariachi band.

"Diamond Mine is the studio where they made Lee Fields' record and Charles Bradley's latest record," Arévalo explains. "We knew that we wanted to work with Leon because of his production skills. You hear it on all his records, and those are records that we've been listening to for the past 10 years. That was definitely the sound e were going for: something that was referencing the classic, timeless era of music, but that still stands the test of time and can still be modern, in a sense. When you listen to his Lee Fields records, you hear the reference of old-school soul, but it's still modern, forward-pushing soul. That's what we wanted to do with our music: reference the music of the past, but still push forward and create something new and relevant."

Chicano Batman aspired to remain true to the moment, in part, through the album's lyrical themes. When they began writing the material during the summer of 2015, Chicano Batman found themselves commenting on issues of race and socio-economic inequality. Even though the record is being released nearly two years after those initial songs were completed, these messages, unfortunately, still ring true.

Arévalo is eager to begin touring in support of *Freedom Is Free*. 79.5—the Brooklyn-based soul group that records for Michels' Big Crown Records—will open the shows, and then their vocalists will stand in for Flor de Toloache.

"We're excited to get on the road and play places that we've never been," Arévalo affir . "We're gonna play Virginia for the fir t time. We're gonna play Michigan for the fir t time and Toronto—it'll be exciting recreating this album live with the singers from 79.5. It's refreshing to have this challenge, where we have to play some really new stuff i front of an audience. Our goal is to play as many places as we can and bring it every night."

Josue Rivas

HOLLY BOWLING

BY CHAD BERNDTSON

HOLLY BOWLING began her 2016 playing atrium piano sets on Jam Cruise. She ended the year taking in—and gigging around—Phish's Madison Square Garden run, on the heels of performances at Warren Haynes' Christmas Jam and Phil Lesh's Terrapin Crossroads. And, along the way, the San Francisco-based pianist collaborated with Lesh, Bob Weir and a who's who of scene luminaries in combinations both spare and sprawling.

Not bad for a classically trained 32-year-old pianist whose top claim to fame, until recently, was a mind-bending recreation of Phish's 37-minute "Tahoe Tweezer" for solo piano.

"Oh, it was as fun as it looked," Bowling coyly chuckles about her panoramic past year. "I've gotten to spend a lot of time playing with so many different people in so many different instrumentations and settings and I've absorbed so much."

Bowling feels like one of the gang now—a staple of the jam scene not only as a longtime fan and listener, but now also as a participating musician earning respect from veterans. She's been ubiquitous throughout the last 12 months and plans to stay that way throughout the next 12, continuing to tour behind her recently released album of Grateful Dead interpretations, *Better Left Unsung*, and opening herself up to other collaborations.

"It was pretty clear from the start that she is extremely talented and is able to play the material and her arrangements extremely well," says Warren Haynes. "But what struck me was that, when thrown into the fire, being as ed earlier that day to be part of Bob Weir's Christmas Jam band, she was able to adapt and improvise on stage with musicians like Bobby, Steve Kimock and myself who have been playing the material for a while and have developed a chemistry with each other over the years."

Bowling is often asked about her process. She explains how most new projects begin with an "incubation period" and then a winnowing down of ideas into what songs will actually work. Her versions of "Cassidy," "Wharf Rat," "Row Jimmy," "Dark Star" and the 6/18/74 specific " yes of the World"—all among the album's standouts—suggest a deep understanding of what Bowling calls the "fabric" of the music, where the details are thoroughly scrutinized but the heart remains.

"I was surprised at how some of the simpler stuff was the most difficult to learn and, sometimes, the most rewarding to play," she says, citing "Wharf Rat" as an example. "There's all of this open space."

She'll bring a similar discipline to future compositions; Bowling is currently making her way through "China Cat Sunflowe ," "Estimated Prophet" and "Unbroken Chain" in her Dead workstream. The "Lost Sailor"/"Saint of Circumstance" pairing is another favorite of Bowling's that she didn't put on the album but has developed over time.

"Sometimes I'm working on arrangements and then lightbulbs go off out of the blue," she explains. "Like, why did I never consider 'Unbroken Chain?' I've heard that forever—how did I miss it? I dove into that one right away."

On occasion the arrangements flow; other times, they're a struggle.

"[Phish's] 'Stash' is killing me right now," Bowling notes. "I wrote something that's unplayable for my hand size! I can hear in my head how it'll be, but I keep taking this back to the drawing board."

Bowling most often performs solo but is open to the idea of bringing a band on the road, as well as more performance opportunities that scratch her improvisational itch.

"It's an amazing emotional release and a way to tap into complete absorption in the moment that I can't find anywhere else," she says of improv. "It's something that I've chased for a long time on the listening side of the music. It's a feeling I fell in love with a long time ago and wanted to find over and over again"

Bowling—who has attended hundreds of Phish shows—notes that she still spends a lot of her downtime listening to music from and beyond the jam scene. (British jazz-electronica groovers GoGo Penguin are one recent favorite.)

She credits the time she's spent with other musicians and greater exposure in the scene with growing her network and expanding her horizons.

"Holly gets it," says Tom Hamilton, who has played with Bowling in several configu ations. "From the fir t time we played together, I felt that I had found a musical equal, conduit and friend. I'm happy to see her gaining the recognition that a woman of her talent deserves and I, personally, would be content to share a stage or studio with her at any time."

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KELLER WILLIAMS

The self-described "one-man band" steps away from his trademark loops for a pair of wildly diffe ent acoustic records. BY MIKE GREENHAUS

TWO AT A TIME

I have two albums coming out at the same time: *Sync*, with KWahtro, and *Raw*, which is a solo record. KWahtro is an evolution of the trio I've had for a few years. We started *Sync* in March or April, and the idea was that it was going to be done in tracks and each musician was gonna take it in his own time. I was hoping to have it finished y August but, long story short, that took a lot longer than I anticipated. We finished it in October and wanted to have a few months to tighten it up.

Raw is basically what I've been doing on this tour with Leo Kottke. Out of all the records I have done, we don't really have anything like this—it's just me and a solo acoustic guitar and microphone. The actual "raw record concept" started in 2011, and the idea was to do 12 songs with 12 diffe ent guitars. I finished it in about a week, and I didn't like it so I scrapped the whole concept. We went on to do a couple of diffe ent records, and then this Leo Kottke tour came about and I wanted to have something that was representative of that. I usually play a lot of clubs without seats where there is a social atmosphere, and that takes a lot of pressure off m , but these shows have been more like a night at the theater. So I took one or two songs from 2011 and added eight more on a couple diffe ent guitars. I'm proud to have two acoustic records that are also very diffe ent.

CREATIVE LOAFING

Both records have new versions of songs that have been released before. On *Raw,* we wanted to try out acoustic versions of some older songs and put out some songs that have never ended up on a record before. Songwriting has been tricky for me during the past several years, once I had kids. My kids are 8 and 12 right now, and some decent songs have definitely come since they've been around, but not as many as before. In terms of songwriting, there usually has to be some kind of decompression that goes in from my career, and then some kind of boredom has to kick in, and that's when the creativity seems to fl w with me; that's been my formula for a long time. And with kids, there's not really a whole lot of time to get bored. I try to schedule time in the day for exercise and some creativity but, when it's forced, sometimes it just doesn't happen like I'm used to. I'm still trying to find that line where I can come up with some songs that make it past a couple of plays live.

KWahtro: Danton Boller, Rodney Holmes, Keller Williams, Gibb Droll (l-r)

OUTSIDE A SMALL CIRCLE OF FRIENDS

KWahtro started as a trio with Jeff Sipe and ob Wasserman [in 2015]. Jeff as in the project on paper until a couple months out when he got picked up to do a bunch of acoustic stuff with arren Haynes, so my fir t call was to Rodney Holmes—this incredible drummer that I've always wanted to work with. I got turned on to Rodney from his Steve Kimock days in the early 2000s. Rodney was coming off of this big tour with Carlos Santana—Rob Thomas and the *Supernatural* record—and, when that ended, he stayed with Steve Kimock for a couple of years. Rob [Wasserman] was also a huge fan of his and got to meet him while he was playing with Bob Weir. Rodney expressed interest in wanting to play with us and, after a couple of years of emails, we figu ed something out. And, of course, Rob got to the point where he was accepting one or two weekends out of the six or seven that I was offerin . And it just felt like he needed time to really focus on his production company, so I called up Danton Boller, an incredible bass player that I saw with Jazz Mandolin Project. I just remembered his fir t name, "Danton"—it's one of those names—but I could never remember his *last* name. We searched him out, and he had a studio in Brooklyn and we all met there. I sent him 20 songs that he charted, learned and just nailed. He's just an unbelievable force on the upright bass, and I feel blessed and lucky to have him on my side. He's also done a few Grateful Grass gigs, where we do bluegrass versions of Grateful Dead songs, and he nails that, too.

PUZZLE PIECE

The last piece of the puzzle is Gibb Droll. He's an old buddy of mine that I used to see in basements at fraternity houses in the '90s before I met him. We became friends and did this Droll and Sipe project [from] the spring of 2007 to late-2008. Since then, we've done a few sporadic little trio gigs, with me on bass and Jeff Sipe on drums, and just kind of stayed in touch. He is an amazing player, super listener—just a kind bro. He's evolved with Bruce Hornsby—he's one of the Noisemakers now—and is very dialed in to Brandi Carlile and her whole world. So there's a couple shows coming up where he is gonna be subbed by Mike Dillon on the vibes. [Dillon] appears on the record on a song called "Whatchu Want, Girl?" You gotta say it like that: "Whatchu *Want*, Girl?!"

ACOUSTIC EDM

Sync has four new songs as well as "Missing Remote," which was cut from three or four diffe ent records and never found a home. And there's two older songs from my fir t two records. From the get-go, the idea for KWahtro was to play acoustic dance music. I have this unhealthy fascination with electronic music—all forms of the genre, from deep house to downtempo, dubstep, trap and brostep. I love that super dark, climbing half-step with the bass. I don't know a lot of other people who like that stuff and, obviously, I can't really go there with my career. Maybe that's why I like it so much. But my idea was to incorporate electronic dance music formulas into my music—use my songs as a template, and create tension builds and half-time drops, but with all acoustic instruments. The rhythm section of Danton and Rodney comes from a jazz background and they have that mentality, so instead of focusing on the formulas of electronic dance music, it morphed into more of a groovy, acoustic acid-jazz thing, and I'm really psyched.

C. Taylor Crothers

REAL ESTATE

IN MIND

BY DEAN BUDNICK

Shawn Brackbill

***IN MIND*, REAL** Estate's fourth full-length LP, marks something of a new beginning for the band. The follow-up to 2014's *Atlas* is the quintet's opening salvo with new guitarist Julian Lynch, who joined the group after the departure of Matt Mondanile. As vocalist and primary songwriter Martin Courtney—whose bandmates also include co-founder and bassist Alex Bleeker, drummer Jackson Pollis and keyboardist Matt Kallman—explains, "He's our old friend so, as soon as we thought of it, it made so much sense. I was on tour for my solo record, and I saw Julian in Wisconsin. We were hanging out, and I floated the idea to him, but I was assuming that he was going to say no because he's working on getting his Ph.D. right now. He seemed interested when we were talking about it and then, toward the end before we were making the record, I gave him a call and was like, 'Hey, were you serious? Would you really want to join the band?' He said yes, and that was very exciting."

The album features another new collaborator, producer Cole M.G.N., who has worked with Beck, Snoop Dogg and Julia Holter. The band knew Holter from his time with Ariel Pink's Haunted Graffit and entrusted him to take on a role unlike that of any of their prior producers. "We wanted to work with Cole," Bleeker explains, "because overall on this record, our goal was to use the studio as an instrument a bit more than we had on previous records. We wanted to have the production element of the album have more character than on *Atlas*, where the goal was to capture what the band can do live in a really succinct, clear and separated way. We decided to go a little bit the other way with this record—'Let's get in the studio and make some production choices to enhance these songs.' Cole has a varied musical history that we like, and he's the fir t person that we gave true producer authority to—where he had a lot of license to make decisions. We put a lot of music down on 'tape' and, when he mixed it, he cut things out and pieced things together. He helped with structuring the arrangements in that way. We trusted him to do that, and we knew he'd be a good candidate for that, and that's why we chose him."

DARLING

MARTIN COURTNEY: Seventy to 80 percent of the songs on the record were demoed out fir t by me, and then we got together, learned the demos, expanded on them and worked on the arrangements. "Darling" was one that I hadn't demoed. That main riff in the song as something that I played a lot with Jackson, our drummer, during soundchecks. I would start playing it and then he would come in with the beat. He would do that thing where it turns around, goes into the off-beat and then everything would fall apart because we would get confused at that point. Anyhow, after we learned all the demos, I started just going through the voice memos on my phone. I had a recording of us playing this little riff and I was like, "Let's turn this into a song."

ALEX BLEEKER: "Darling" always felt to me like it would be the lead track from the moment that it came together. It felt best suited to share fir t because, while the chord progression was Martin's, the structure and the way the song was put together felt like a group, collaborative effor —

almost like the feel of the song was something we discovered together.

SERVE THE SONG

COURTNEY: This is one of the only songs where I wrote the lead guitar part. A lot of what ended up on the record is similar to the demo that I made, but then Alex changed the bassline and Julian obviously wrote that really cool solo that he does. He brought the "wah" idea in—that was something that I had not done. The actual texture of his guitar—to have a more distorted-sounding lead guitar sound—is something diffe ent for us. Lyrically, it's one in a number of songs that are about being in a band. That song is kind of about, "Do I really want to make another album of music and continue this cycle where we put out a record, tour and I'm away from my family?" It's about just deciding to do that again, making the decision to keep playing music. As much as I love doing it, it's a very strange way to live your life.

STAINED GLASS

BLEEKER: This tune is a real grower. I think what really sticks out in "Stained Glass" is the chorus. It's a super Birds-y melody. Julian wrote a beautiful counter-melody on his guitar to the part that Martin had brought to the table and, when that happened, it was like the writing process just opened up for everybody at that moment because the harpsichord intro is a diffe ent vibe than I'm used to for Real Estate. It's intricate and a diffe ent mood. I love that—how it contrasts and then opens up into this bright, super airy, melodic chorus.

AFTER THE MOON

COURTNEY: That was one of the early demos I made, using a drum machine that I bought off C aigslist. I just let it run on this little waltz speed. We called it "Waltz" forever—that was the working title of it. I'm just really happy with the way it's turned out, and it reminds me of the music that I loved in high school—classic indie-rock. It sounds like Built to Spill to me.

BLEEKER: This one I'm really fond of, production-wise, and it sticks out to me in terms of using the studio as an instrument. It's a really good headphone listen. There's interesting stuff going on with the panning. There are all these structured, subtle textures that are happening underneath the vocals. There's a little bit of the drum machine that both comes and goes, and there's this disorienting rhythmic pattern. It's subdued, but it may be a contender for my favorite because of all of those elements.

TWO ARROWS

COURTNEY: That's another one that came out of a voice memo on my phone. We were trying to figu e out more songs to work on, and I came upon this little jam that I had forgotten about. It was basically the main cyclical verse riff. I couldn't remember where it was from, and then it finally d wned on me: We were in Paris recording something for La Blogothèque in someone's apartment. There were all these people sitting around us waiting for us to start playing a concert, and we were just jamming on this little thing.

Real Estate 3.0: Polla, Kallman, Courtney, Bleeker, Lynch (l-r)

We took that and I wrote a chorus for it, but then that whole long outro section actually came from a diffe ent voice memo. It was me and Jackson at a festival in Germany, Immergut Festival, which is this really beautiful festival that happens north of Berlin—up in the forest, basically. We were joking around, calling it "Upstate Berlin." It felt like Upstate New York. Anyway, the outro came from this separate voice memo, and we stuck them together and it seemed to really work. The original demo that we made—the way we had learned it and written it—we played it at this mid-tempo pace, definitely a lot fa ter than it is on the record. Then Cole said to us: "You guys have a lot of mid-tempo songs; I think things are sometimes more interesting if they are either weirdly fast or weirdly slow. Why don't we try this one super-duper slow?

BLEEKER: Well, obviously, the massive outro, that's the thing to talk about, which has been really fun to play live. If people come out and see us, then we're just gonna get further and further out with that thing. It's repetitive, but there are also variations within the repetition. It was fun to record, and there are hours of that stuff. So that's the fir t thing that comes to mind with that track, but I like the harmony in there, and it's got this very thick, syrupy, enveloping quality. The outro was fun to put on record, but it's gonna be even more fun to see how that thing evolves live over the years. I think it's definitely going to be a big jam-out staple—speaking to the *Relix* crowd.

WHITE LIGHT

COURTNEY: "White Light" is an older one. That's the only one that's a holdover from *Atlas*. We recorded it and, for some reason, I just didn't ever really like the recording that we had, even though other people liked it. We decided to try it again during the writing sessions for this record, and the way we played it this time just felt good. Julian came up with a nice part for the song, so I'm glad we brought it back. Also, I feel like it's got this brightness to it that fits nicely in the context of the rest of the album.

HOLDING PATTERN

BLEEKER: This one seems, to me, to be the biggest stylistic departure for us; we had fun with it. The working title for this song was "Sleaze" because we thought it had sort of a sleazy kind of feel, especially with the synth. There's a little bit of a bass synthesizer in there, and I think you can hear us having fun exploring new territory—both the way that it's recorded and also just the music in general.

COURTNEY: That's actually another one of my favorites, if not my favorite song on the record. I love how the recording turned out. Matt went in and improvised on this Sequential Circuits Prophet synthesizer. He was playing weird little stuff, messing around with the oscillators and whatever. I don't know too much about synthesizers, but he was doing all this crazy stuff. Cole mixed it in, and it added a lot of nice texture to that song. It just feels surprising to me, and diffe ent from a lot of stuff that e've done before. I feel like that's the most synth-y song on the record. I'm pretty happy with that one.

TIME

COURTNEY: "Time" is kind of an outlier in terms of the vibe. It was the fir t song that I wrote for this record, other than "White Light." It was hard to learn because it has a very unusual structure—it's got that Kraftwerk drum-machine sound. Then Jackson added these mallet hits on the toms. It's got a nice rhythm to it. I'm happy with the percussion on that song.

After the second chorus, the chorus repeats again and there's a solo section that sounds really Steely Dan to me. It's like, "We're just going to go full Steely Dan on this

Continued on page 79

Shawn Brackbill

JANINE SMALL

BY BRADLEY TUCKER

ON ANY GIVEN NIGHT, when she is not at home with her husband and son, Janine Small can usually be found at a concert around New York City, or at any number of music festivals around the country. In many cases, she's been working on the show long before she arrives onsite—negotiating a deal for either the event's promoters or performers. Small, a devoted lawyer and lifelong Deadhead, is in the business of protecting the diverse mix of entertainers she represents. "It is more important now than ever to make sure that our clients are properly educated in certain business terms so they know when they need to seek our counsel," she says.

What was the music scene like where you grew up?

New Wave was the rage when I was growing up on Long Island. I looked young, had no fake ID and had strict parents who didn't let me go to shows at Nassau Coliseum until I was nearly done with high school, but I spent many weekends at the Levittown roller rink and the all-age dance club Uncle Sam's/Spit. I was a regular at the "Mini Cinema," where I saw *The Grateful Dead Movie*, *The Song Remains the Same* and so many other seminal concert movies. I also fondly remember seeing Joni Mitchell at Jones Beach—when they still had the moat—Bobby & The Midnites at Stony Brook, Jerry Garcia Band at the Felt Forum, The Who and The Clash at Shea Stadium, and Peter, Paul and Mary and David Bromberg at Hofstra University.

I was a devoted, "grateful" Deadhead. I still have my painted *Aoxomoxoa* denim jacket from high school and begged my brother to take me to my fir t show at Madison Square Garden in 1981. During college, I studied diligently in the back seat while touring the United States seeing the band. I camped and stayed in hotel rooms packed with 15 people and paid my way by selling ponchos and sandwiches.

What was your first job in the music business, and what led you to that job?

My fir t job in the music business lasted 23 years with the same firm. I as a young lawyer in New York who wanted to get into the music business when a mentor recommended me for a position at [the firm n w known as] Carroll, Guido & Groffman. Th ee weeks after the interview, I moved across the country, took a 75 percent pay cut and followed my dreams. After achieving partnership and working on many groundbreaking deals with some of the biggest artists around, I decided that I was ready to open my own shop in 2015.

Describe an early influence on your career.

Fellow music attorney Ed Pierson had such a significant impact on my career. I like to talk and I'm a people person with an analytical mind, so I decided to go to law school in order to advocate for the artists I admired. I met Ed when he was chair of the American Bar Association Forum on the Entertainment and Sports Industries. We put on a legal music symposium at my school, and he invited me to write for their magazine and work on several projects. With his advice and guidance during those early years, he also helped me land my fir t and only music-business job.

What was an initial lesson you learned?

My most important life lessons were from my father. He always told me not to sweat the small stuff. When he knew I was working hard and stressed out, he told me "the best you can do is all we expect," as opposed to adding the usual pressure of the phrase "the best you can do is the least we expect." He

reminded me not to dwell on errors or what may happen and live in the present—be confiden without worrying about how to resolve things that never come to fruition.

Do you have a favorite story about an artist or festival you work with?

I am happiest seeing my clients' dreams become a reality and knowing I played a small role in helping them. I negotiated O.A.R.'s fir t producer agreement with a member's father—a corporate lawyer—who, due to my style of negotiation and attention to detail, later hired me and told me, "We got our kids to college and we're relying on you to get them to the next level." The band's fir t show in New York City was at the Village Underground and, in 2006, they sold out Madison Square Garden.

Another great day was when one of my idols, Bonnie Raitt, gave me a shout-out at the Beacon Theatre and thanked me for looking out for her as her attorney. I love seeing deals I handled come to life, whether it is Ben Harper or Neil Young looking out at a sea of 80,000 fans at Bonnaroo; watching Stevie Wonder from the cabana at the Hangout Music Festival; and last, but definitely not lea t, hanging with my Deadhead brethren in Chicago during the Dead's Fare Thee Well concert. I had the amazing opportunity to negotiate the deals for the record-breaking pay-per-view telecast.

Those who attended the 2011 Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival may remember the hundreds of amazing blue LED lights that fell from the sky after the end of the Arcade Fire and Primus sets. I spent many hours in lockstep with the festival's insurance agent discussing the liability, safety, insurance and indemnification issues surrounding the parachutists who would be releasing these flashing light . I was assured by all that there was no concern, as the parachutists were to land at a field s veral miles from the festival site.

After Arcade Fire's set ended, I was walking to another event behind the main stage in a narrow corridor between the stage and the production trucks. As I was admiring the beautiful display in the sky, I was almost struck down by something flying verhead, which landed no more than 10 feet in front of me. To my surprise and almost laughable shock, it was one of the parachutists who missed his mark and almost took out the lawyer who was so intent on protecting the audience.

How has your current job changed from when you started?

The internet and explosion of digital distribution has changed the entire business. Piracy has increased, distribution is more efficient and th e is less money being made from individual sales. To make up for this loss, the record deals have become more complicated and expansive, but without providing the funding to compensate for the time and energy needed to properly negotiate and close the deals. Performers are also bombarded with promotional opportunities, which often do not involve financial eward but include overly broad contract rights. Left unnegotiated, these agreements could result in the artist giving up rights to their music without royalties, fees or approvals.

ELVIN BISHOP

Just over 40 years since he "fooled around and fell in love again," Pigboy Crabshaw gets back to the basics. BY JEFF TAMARKIN

IT WAS MORE than 50 years ago when a young man, who grew up fir t on a farm in Iowa, then in Tulsa, Okla., came to Chicago armed with a college scholarship and a guitar. He'd spent many hours learning how to play blues licks on that machine and, now, he was going to be in the place where his favorite music came from. Elvin Bishop, later nicknamed Pigboy Crabshaw, was in hog heaven.

"Blues wasn't especially popular where I lived," says Bishop, now 74. "[The races in] Oklahoma were strictly separated. The radio was the only way that a white guy was gonna be exposed to it. I really just went crazy for it."

Even when he arrived in Chicago, Bishop found that it wasn't all that easy to go out and hear blues, "unless you went to the ghetto, which about 99.9 percent were not willing to do." Bishop was willing, though, and he discovered that the older, established black bluesmen were "amazingly friendly and supportive. If you go into it with a good attitude, you make friends with people."

Bishop got to sit in with many of his heroes, and by the mid-'60s he'd met other aspiring blues players who shared his enthusiasm. The Paul Butterfield Blues and, led by its namesake on vocals and harmonica, became all the rage around Chicago, and their fame quickly spread. The group, which featured the twin guitars of Bishop and Mike Bloomfield, became egulars at the Fillmore Auditorium in San Francisco, at New York clubs and at folk festivals—like the one in Newport in 1965 where a couple of their guys backed Bob Dylan for his game-changing, controversial electric set.

The Butterfield Blues Band signed to Elektra Records and their self-titled debut album, followed by the landmark, progressive blues-jazz juggernaut *East-West*, established them as one of the most important and influential bands of the era. "It was a pretty amazing thing," Bishop says about being involved with the band. "[The success] really wasn't anything that anybody predicted or expected. We just wanted to be like the guys we loved—our heroes like Muddy Waters, Little Walter, Howlin' Wolf and Buddy Guy."

When Bloomfield left to form The Electric Flag in 1967, Bishop's role was elevated. He stuck with Butterfield—the band, including Bishop, is now enshrined in the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame—for two more albums, but then decided it was time to go off on his own. He relocated to the Bay Area—"The weather is nice and everybody was in tie-dyed T-shirts and all friendly," he says—and put together The Elvin Bishop Group, melding a modern soul sound with his beloved blues. The band played the local clubs and ballrooms of San Francisco regularly, and recorded their fir t album for promoter Bill Graham's short-lived Fillmore label.

Bishop's popularity grew, although he never attained mega-stardom. Then, in 1976, the strangest thing happened: "Fooled Around and Fell in Love," a song Bishop wrote—released by Capricorn Records under his name but featuring the vocal of Mickey Thomas—became a hit. A huge hit: It reached No. 3 nationally. It was, by any measure, a pop-rock song, although the blues was still at its core. Rather than capitalize on it, Bishop just went back to doing what he had always done: playing and singing funky, good-time groove music informed by the blues.

And that's what he's still doing, more than 40 years and 20-some albums later. His

Big Fun Trio

newest, *Big Fun Trio* (Alligator Records), is as good as any that have come before it, but this one's got a new twist. For this project, Bishop puts aside his regular full band to get back to the basics. With just Bob Welsh playing guitar and piano, and Willy Jordan on cajón (a box-shaped hand drum) and vocals, Bishop—on guitar and vocals, of course—rams through a dozen solid blues tunes, several of his own and a handful of well-chosen covers. It's raw and simple, and utterly endearing. Three harmonica players, including the legendary Charlie Musselwhite, sit in.

With *Big Fun Trio*, Bishop says, "I just wanted to do this other thing. I was surprised at how well it stood up with just the cajón, and no drums and no bass. Bob is a multi-talented guy—he can make the guitar sound like a bass—and I had Willy on a couple of other recording projects, so it was easy to get together."

The opening track on the album, Bishop's own "Keep on Rollin'," is his commentary on the state of the country. Pointed in its lyrical narrative but embedded with characteristic Bishop humor, he wonders if there's even a diffe ence between Congress and the circus, then deduces that they're all "a bunch of clowns."

The song, he says, "was written before the election, when everybody thought it was gonna go the other way, but I like it a lot because it represents the use of all our resources. We've got the harmony singing and Bob plays a hell of a piano part. In the middle, he switches over to playing the bass on guitar, and the whole thing works out pretty cool."

Which is kind of how it's always worked out for Elvin Bishop, ever since, as a young teenager, he heard Elvis Presley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Chuck Berry. "I loved that," he says. "Then I found out that the parts that I liked about it were coming from blues."

There was no turning back after that. He still has a devoted audience and is heading out on the road with the Big Fun Trio, as a duo with Musselwhite and with his regular band. And if, for whatever reason, the audiences should stop coming, "I'll just sit on my porch and play," Bishop says. Spoken like a true bluesman.

PAUL SHAFFER

The World's Most Dangerous Band reclaims its name BY DEAN BUDNICK

PAUL SHAFFER IS getting the band back together. The longtime David Letterman musical director—who also put in stints at *Saturday Night Live* and with The Blues Brothers, among his many other projects over the years—has reassembled his longtime musical collaborators for a new album and tour. The eponymous *Paul Shaffer & he World's Most Dangerous Band* resurrects the group's original name from back in 1982 when they debuted on NBC's *Late Night with David Letterman*. Eleven years later, the group followed the talk show host to CBS for the *Late Show with David Letterman* and were rechristened the CBS Orchestra until the program's final taping in May 2015.

New York's Electric Lady Studios served as the hub where Shaffer and his outfi worked with renowned producer Richard Gottehrer, who began his own career at New York's iconic Brill Building, writing such songs as "My Boyfriend's Back," "Hang on Sloopy" and "I Want Candy." The World's Most Dangerous Band still features Felicia Collins (guitar), Anton Fig (drums), Will Lee (bass) and Sid McGinnis (guitar), along with a horn section comprising Tom Malone, Frank Greene and Aaron Heick. Throughout *Paul Shaffer & he World's Most Dangerous Band*, the ensemble explores a range of soulful funk grooves with the help of guest vocalists such as Jenny Lewis, Dion, Bill Murray, Darius Rucker, Shaggy and Valerie Simpson. They'll also take to the road over the coming months in support of the new record.

Before we talk about your latest album, I'd like to hear your memories of the Jammy Awards.

The World's Most Dangerous Band

[Shaffer appeared in 2001, when the show took place at Roseland Ballroom.]

I love the Jammys. You were just across the street from us that year at Roseland. Les Claypool was there that year, and I got to play with him. I remember it as a freewheeling festival, the schedule of which didn't seem that nailed down, so there was a lot of hanging out involved. But that was only right in keeping with the style of music and such. So it was a learning experience for me.

Speaking of which, there's a musician that I have played with since I was in college. He is a guitarist in the spiritual mode of Mahavishnu, but really John Coltrane. His name is Tisziji Muñoz. When I met him, he was in Canada. He lives in Upstate New York now, but I continue to play with him. He also plays a lot with John Medeski. But he is a very far-out avant-garde spiritualist. I always think, "Boy, he should be happening in the jamband scene." Medeski is, of course. But I don't know why it hasn't gelled for him. It's free music, Coltrane-esque. I've been trained by him since my college days to play in this mode of musical expression that some people don't expect from me. But I was always fascinated by him, and we've kept our friendship all these years.

Jumping to the new record, you're billed as The World's Most Dangerous Band, the name you used back when you were on NBC. Did you have any intellectual property issues with using that name again?

We weren't able to call ourselves that anymore when we moved to CBS. It was great being the CBS Orchestra for 22 years, but we're not the CBS Orchestra anymore, so we had to find another nam .

I remember saying, "The best name we ever had was The World's Most Dangerous Band," which Dave Letterman made up, of course. And my manager, Eric Gardner, said, "I don't think there's an executive over at NBC that was even *alive* when that stuff as going on." He may have been right because whomever he called over there said, "Oh, I didn't even know about this! Go ahead. Use the name!" So they were very gracious, but it's such ancient history that they didn't care; they gave me permission to use it again. So we got back to where we once belonged.

With a nod to The Blues Brothers, was it a challenge to get the band back together?

It was a scheduling challenge because people are busy. For instance, Anton is traveling with Joe Bonamassa on a yearly basis. So he's constantly out on the road—in North America, Australia, New Zealand. Will Lee keeps incredibly busy, too, doing studio sessions as well as his touring with The Fab Faux, his Beatles band, in which they replicate everything note for note.

But everyone was able to

Continued on page 76

IT'S (STILL) ONLY LIFE

THE FEELIES RETURN, AGAIN BY JESSE JARNOW

The Feelies today: Stan Demeski, Dave Weckerman, Brenda Sauter, Glenn Mercer, Bill Million (l-r)

WATCH THE OLDEST VIDEO OF The Feelies on YouTube—of the band playing "Crazy Rhythms" in 1979—and part of their considerable legacy as indie-rock forerunners begins to seem suspect, replaced by something even more intriguing. Founded in the mid-'70s in New Jersey, the quintet is known for giving inspiration to bands like R.E.M. and Yo La Tengo, and their thoughtful jangle is heard in more contemporary easy-goers like Real Estate, too. The new acoustic-oriented *In Between*, The Feelies' sixth album and second since reuniting in 2008, will probably get filed as "indie" on streaming services. But that's just who The Feelies are to some of the people, some of the time.

Signed initially to Ork Records—the influential proto-punk label that put out early singles by Patti Smith and Television—The Feelies frequented the same circuit of New York venues, including Max's Kansas City and CBGB, where that early video comes from, shot for New York public access television not long before the release of their debut album. Within a year or two, the band would semi-retire to their hometown of Haledon, transforming from their pogoing younger selves into The Willies (devoted to Brian Eno-influenced atmospherics and quadraphonic tape music), Yung Wu (fronted by percussionist Dave Weckerman) and playing in The Trypes (a local mystic-folk act), before turning back into a kinder, gentler Feelies.

But trapped on video in the front row of CBGB in 1979 is one particular skeleton key to the band's music: a hippie, dancing ecstatically. Maybe he's even an actual Deadhead. While the rest of the Bowery intelligentsia nod along appreciatively, this dude goes at it, locked into the not-so-secret piece that continues to make The Feelies diffe ent from nearly every band that has followed.

"You still see that sometimes," says Glenn Mercer, the band's singer, guitarist and chief songwriter, along with partner Bill Million. "That's a high compliment, really. We're not real comfortable performing to begin with, so I don't like the idea of somebody just standing there watching the band."

But it also shouldn't come as a surprise. Together, Mercer and Million obsessively shaped The Feelies, playing nearly the same setlist over and over again as the songs changed subtly—energies building, arrangements shifting, lyrics getting rewritten, percussion parts being added—until each song hurtled forward with its own Feelies-like logic. After all, they did name their fir t album *Crazy Rhythms*.

And while the manic Feelies of the late-'70s (who downed chlorophyll before shows for extra pep) are plenty diffe ent from the matured Feelies of the 21st century, it is the same sense of meticulous organization that drives *In Between*, as if each song is a small, particularly calibrated machine. They're not likely to get hippies dancing, but the sense of movement remains palpable—the thrill of The Feelies relying on group dynamics.

"In 1976, we all fell in love with *Another Green World* by Brian Eno," says Dave Weckerman, the band's original drummer and current percussionist. "There were all kinds of things going on with that record, percussion-wise. We didn't know what it was, but it sounded cool. That was the beginning of the extra percussive stuff, although we didn't do it live yet." Weckerman would briefly move to England in search of punk rock and, eventually, to a second percussion setup.

On *In Between*, despite a return to some of the acoustic feels of 1986's *The Good Earth* (their fir t comeback album), drummer Stan Demeski and Weckerman create a firm and steady tock; what once kept the pogoing Mercer and Million tethered to earth now keeps the band from drifting into acoustic strumville.

No bongo-playin' wind-chimer, Weckerman's sharp pulses make for tight drama. "Every beat, everything in the band, is worked out way ahead of time, and once it's set, that's it. You don't break from what's been established," says Weckerman.

Learning the original *Crazy Rhythms* songs "was one of the hardest things I've ever done!" he says. "It took me about two weeks of listening to cassette tapes, and Glenn would meticulously write out, like, 'Second snare part comes in on the third bar of the guitar solo.'"

Though The Feelies have gotten quieter, and maybe a touch slower, the meticulousness remains. "You have to take notes and write it all down," Weckerman says of his preparation for *In Between*. "For the new record, I have, like, a whole page of notes for each song."

"We're playing pretty simple music; it's not like it's fusion or anything," says Demeski, a trained drummer who joined the band as a 19 year old in 1983, sharing the band's love for The Velvet Underground. "There are only so many things you'd play anyway."

Though it's a cliché to talk about the things musicians *don't* play, in The Feelies, it became a credo for their percussion arrangements, removing the extraneous, melodramatic cymbal parts favored by most bands, let alone ones with more than one percussionist.

"In The Feelies, we certainly didn't want to be like the Grateful Dead or the Allman Brothers," says Weckerman. "That gets to be redundant. And plus, those guys knew what they were doing and all that. The thing with The Feelies—with the double drumming—is we wanted to keep it very basic, and it wouldn't be on every song because that would be redundant, so the drums would come in for certain parts and then go away. When we do cover songs at the end of the night, we do more Allman Brothers-like double drumming."

"Right from the very beginning, Bill and I had the idea we'd get a drummer like [The Velvet Underground's] Moe Tucker, with no frills," says Mercer. "We found there was a lot of space." While their taste in percussion hasn't changed, the way The Feelies have occupied that space continues to evolve.

* * *

RECORDED IN MERCER'S basement, the band's longtime practice space, *In Between* is perhaps the warmest Feelies album, acoustic guitars blending easily over the not-so-crazy rhythms. Permeated with layers of ambient production, quietly mixed wordless vocals, bells, rhythmic clicks and occasional bursts of Frippertronic guitar, it is their most experimental album since their lost early-'80s period as The Willies, whose adventures only survive on a few live tapes and a hissy cassette compilation.

"We wanted to include the ambient stuff because e felt it added a lot of character to the mood of the record," says Mercer. "Most of those parts were in place on the demo as well. We wanted the mixes to be layered in a way that allows the listener a chance to discover new things over time. I think, at this point, we're not too concerned when writing with the thought of performance, and we're thinking of records as a separate endeavor. In general, our records all have about the same number of parts, but this time, we really took our time to make sure everything occupied its own sonic space and didn't get in the way of other parts. We spent a lot of time exploring the stereo spread to find an inte esting balance. One of the reasons we decided to record at home was to be able to be a little more experimental and to, hopefully, create more atmosphere in the process."

Mercer says most of their work these days is instinctual, less fussed-over than the band's only semi-mythologized early years. "We don't really talk too much," he says of Feelies practice sessions, echoing the title track of *Crazy Rhythms*: "I don't talk much 'cause it gets in the way," Mercer sings there. "Don't let it get in the way."

"They've always resisted the professional musician thing," Stan Demeski says of The Feelies' creative mindset. "They always wanted to be inspired."

Even if the band sounds more easygoing, however, The Feelies' sense of mission remains paramount, and is still driven by that meticulousness. "Even as loud as we play sometimes, if you make a mistake, you'll hear about it in the dressing room later," says Weckerman. "It's like playing with James Brown," he adds wryly, minus Brown's infamous fine .

It is a music that continues to define them. ecently, Weckerman says, he and Demeski went to see Wild Carnation, a band led by Feelies bassist Brenda Sauter. He was struck by how Feelies-like it felt, even though it's one of their few spinoffs not containing multiple members of the band. "We've all got it imprinted on us, that driving *Crazy Rhythms* sound," Weckerman says.

> "We're not real comfortable performing to begin with, so I don't like the idea of somebody just standing there watching the band."
>
> **GLENN MERCER**

Demeski acknowledges that they don't talk much, but being a Feelie can still carry its own demands. "They almost expect more out of you than they expect out of themselves, somehow," he says of the bandleaders' particular basement aesthetic, content to work at their own pace. During the '70s, the band only played a half-dozen shows a year, at the most. For most of The Feelies' career, music-making is something that's occurred primarily at home.

"They've always resisted the professional musician thing," says Demeski. "They always wanted to be inspired. When you're out on the road every night, you're not going to be inspired. Ironically, we did play a lot, especially toward the end [in the early '90s], but all the playing is sort of what made us stop, too."

Though they no longer have fi ed times to play, the jam sessions at Mercer's house continue ever onward. While Million lives in Florida and Sauter lives in Pennsylvania, a rotating cast filters th ough, usually including Weckerman. "I'll probably go there this weekend because a friend of ours is coming up from Atlantic City," he says. "My drum set is always at Glenn's. It's been at Glenn's for the past 25 years, maybe. It's like Glenn's house studio drum set."

The sessions are purely informal. "Somebody'll play drums," Weckerman adds. Maybe Mercer, maybe Weckerman, maybe somebody else. "Maybe we'll play acoustic guitars, you never know what's going to happen. But we do that all the time because we like to play, that's the thing. Sometimes we'll do some of Glenn's originals, sometimes we'll do Feelies songs; we do a lot of covers." And lots of jams, sometimes distant antecedents to new Feelies material.

"We don't record those sessions," Weckerman says. "Probably many potential songs have just vanished into the atmosphere. But then, sometimes, a guitar riff will be remembered and we keep it and that becomes a new song." Gradually. Slowly.

As Demeski says, The Feelies' songs aren't terribly complicated, but like a painter working in a theme or mode, each generates its own nuances and surprises. Despite their fi ed-in-stone arrangements and the predictable show-closing combo of "Raised Eyebrows"/"Crazy Rhythms," it's still virtually impossible to predict exactly where The Feelies might swerve next. Even Demeski seems as if he's stopped trying to figu e it out. "These days, [Glenn and Bill] seem to be more prolific than they used to be, too, which is pretty weird, but OK," he audibly shrugs.

Celebrating their 40th anniversary in mid-2016 with a pair of guest-studded shows in New Jersey, featuring members of Yo La Tengo and most of the band's previous members, The Feelies continued to discover small paradoxes. A rock band that prefers staying at home to the hassle of going on the road, they are also a band worth seeing live over and over again, not because they jam their songs out, but because of the magical moments when their song-machines click together and come alive. Fan-traded Feelies live recordings sampled from diffe ent years reveal the band's immutable battle cry against an ever-changing world, their setlist like a mantra that, most blissfully, continues to do its mysterious work. The songs remain the same.

ARMY OF ONE

Having endured a divorce and overcome his demons, Jason Lytle reboots Grandaddy with a new set of personal tales and fan-friendly thoughts.

BY RYAN REED

Dan Cronin

OVER A DECADE AGO, while driving down a back-country road, Grandaddy mastermind Jason Lytle gazed out of his car window and noticed something peculiar: a boat parked in a barn. "Immediately, it implanted this metaphor in my mind," he says. "This boat should probably be out in a lake, floating out some place nice, but it's stored away right now. But the fact that it's in the barn probably means all hope is not lost. It's gonna get its opportunity to come back out again."

Throughout his mercurial career with Grandaddy, Lytle has excelled at these sort of philosophical ruminations. But that boat metaphor, brought to life in the space-pop band's new song "The Boat Is in the Barn," resonates in a more blatantly personal way. At the most literal level, it symbolizes the songwriter's difficult processing a life-altering divorce—one that hovers like a ghost above *Last Place*, the band's fir t LP in 11 years.

On "Barn," Lytle gazes backward at his faded relationship, building a character portrait of his ex-wife with laser-focused detail. Over shimmering synthesizers and piano, he delivers an emotional gut-punch, recalling a picture of his then-wife hanging on the "mudroom wall."

"There was a real water-skiing trip that took place," he says of the photo. "It's one of my favorite memories ever of her. There's no way in hell, for the last 10 years, you'd talk her into getting on water skis but, at some point, there she was, which was pretty insane. There's a lot of real stuff going on there. I'm just trying to get through it without being too depressing-sounding. I got to finally ealize this little snapshot I had in my head."

On the other hand, the odd metaphor also represents Grandaddy itself: With the cathartic *Last Place*, Lytle finally ta es that goddamn boat out of the barn.

The band's fifth album is vintage Lytle and is carefully—and self-consciously—crafted to meet fans' expectations. With its lush keyboards, detailed production quirks and that nasally, melancholy tenor voice, it seamlessly echoes the symphonic, bummed-out ELO approach that defined classics like 2000's *The Sophtware Slump* and 2003's *Sumday*. But looking back at the group's slow-burn breakup, it's shocking that *Last Place* even exists.

During the intense sessions for 2006's *Just Like the Fambly Cat*, Lytle retreated into his home studio, launching into a period of heavy alcohol and drug consumption. By this point, Grandaddy—composed of Lytle, drummer Aaron Burtch, bassist Kevin Garcia, guitarist Jim Fairchild and keyboardist Tim Dryden onstage—had essentially dissolved into a solo project. Only Burtch, who co-founded the band in 1992, contributed to that LP as a full-fledged player. With the quintet burned out from touring, stressed out over money and barely communicating, they pulled the plug earlier that same year after one final band meeting.

Lytle felt liberated without the burden of carrying the Grandaddy brand on his back. He hit the road for a couple of brief solo tours, formed indie-rock side-project Admiral Radley with Burtch and the members of Earlimart, and—in an admirable gesture of rock disconnect—moved from Modesto, Calif., the hometown he'd grown to despise, to Montana. There, breathing in the mountain air, he recorded two solo records, 2009's *Yours Truly, the Commuter* and 2012's *Dept. of Disappearance*, which hoisted the Grandaddy banner in every aspect but the name.

With a healthier grip on his music and lifestyle, it seems bizarre for Lytle to jump back onto the Grandaddy treadmill. But looking back, the move feels predestined: The band, proceeding with extreme caution, reunited for a handful of shows in 2012, and the songwriter found himself toying with the idea of recording new material. "I think, even when I was working on my last solo record, I had some songs popping up," he says. "Things just kind of sneak up on me. A lot of times, these little plots start to unravel, and I'm like, 'Something's happening here, and I'm not quite sure what it is.' I need to be aware of it."

During a hike in Montana, he was struck with the lyrics for "Evermore," a tense synth-rock stunner from *Last Place*. Then came the seeds of "A Lost Machine," a slow-climbing art-rock ballad—and the album's sonic centerpiece. "When that started happening, I knew, 'All right, I'm definitely working on a Grandaddy record,'" he says. "That fueled the excitement of the idea of even doing it. I kinda took myself back to Grandaddy school at that point."

Lytle drew on real-life angst to fuel his momentum. His marriage began to crumble, and he moved away from his Montana paradise to Portland, Ore., where he lived for three years, never feeling comfortable in the big city. That period of discontent inspired the churning, pissed-off sin -along "I Don't Wanna Live Here Anymore." ("I'd never lived in a [real] city before, even a metropolitan area," he says. "I was even on the outskirts there, but it had that always-going hum like a big city. Everything was a little dirtier and louder and rougher. I was like, 'God, take me home to Montana.'")

Meanwhile, he developed "A Lost Machine" into a signature Grandaddy showcase. Lytle subtly alludes to his divorce, utilizing the "machine" imagery that defines ma y of his classic albums. "There are a lot of songs on this album where I'm pretty much blatantly talking about the dissolving of a very long and precious relationship I was in, but not wanting to come right out and be too literal and honest," he says. "With that one, I'm blaming the machines again—because it's definitely not the humans' fault. It's a comfy place for me to go. I recognize I used to do that a lot with Grandaddy as well. I had no problem going back in that comfortable mode and getting it off y chest."

Having removed himself from the band's catalog for so

long, Lytle hyped himself up to write by "literally listening to old Grandaddy" online and "getting excited by what a freak [I] used to be in the studio." He was also spurred on by the encouragement of fans, having "eavesdropped" on their internet chatter. But recording under the Grandaddy name presented a higher creative bar—one that proved tough to hurdle.

* * *

BY 2015, THE CREATIVE PROCESS was in full bloom, and Grandaddy staged a second reunion tour the following summer. To facilitate rehearsals and logistical planning, Lytle moved back to Modesto, a city he's frequently trash-talked but still considers home in an inexplicable way. ("Six months ago, I would have laughed at you if you told me I'd be living here," he says. "I would have said, 'No way in hell.'")

"I just had to slowly absorb things," he says of the reboot. "I just had to be out there and things started to get processed in this way I wasn't even aware of. Next thing you know, I'm running the machines again. I have all this information stored up, and sometimes I get blocked up and stuck on something, and I'll refer back to some of these memories. There's definitely an emphasis on, 'I'm going to try to make this sound like Grandaddy,' and that was a cool thing to be inspired by throughout the process. I don't know if this sounds corny, but [the influence] as really by fans getting excited. I want Grandaddy fans to like this, so, 'What do I have to do to this sound to make them like this?'"

For Burtch, the process was more methodical. As usual, Lytle assembled ornate demos and then brought in the drummer to track his parts, forming the album's basic foundation. From there, Burtch had to wait on mixes, realizing the songs that he'd previously adored may have morphed into something new.

"I'll get the demo and kind of fall in love with the song," he says. "But sometimes, after we've recorded, Jason will go, 'That's too nice' or 'That's too pretty' or 'That's too straightforward.' He'll throw something in to fuck it up or change a progression in the back to make things discordant or whatever. That's one of his signature things. And, generally, I'll like it but, sometimes, I'll hear something and go, 'Ahh, fuck, I liked the old version!'"

For the other band members, the process can be awkward: sitting on the sidelines as their mastermind works his magic. This time around, Lytle says Fairchild—who recently collaborated with Isaac Brock in Modest Mouse—hoped to be "a little more involved" in the recording. But the frontman felt it would be "too risky" altering their approach at such a precarious stage.

Lytle remains unapologetic about his insular approach, emphasizing that he never signed up for being a "bandleader" in the fir t place. "Even in the early days of Grandaddy, being a bandleader was like being a McDonald's manager," he says. "You're just barking orders at people and telling people what to do: 'This is how you run the napkin machine, and this is how you boil the fries.' I never, ever wanted to be in that position, so one of the easiest ways to get out of that was to make very clear demos. 'Here, live with this for a week so that'll make playing together a lot easier, and I won't have to talk. We can talk about funny things and friendly things, and it's not like me yelling orders at people.' I never wanted to be that person."

"I just had to slowly absorb things," Lytle says of his band's reboot. "I just had to be out there and things started to get processed in this way I wasn't even aware of."

> "Even in the early days of Grandaddy, being a bandleader was like being a McDonald's manager. You're just barking orders at people and telling people what to do."
>
> **JASON LYTLE**

So, here we are. Grandaddy, against seemingly insurmountable odds, has restarted the band machinery, armed with a batch of breathtaking, archetypal songs and tentative touring plans. But a "cautious" Lytle, constantly dreaming of that next mountain retreat or country drive, already has a finger h vering over the eject button.

"I'm nervous but, at some point, I had to go, 'Shit, here we go. There's only one way to find out'" he says. "If it gets too much, I am 100-percent prepared to go, 'OK, this was a bad idea' and disappear off the face of the earth again.

"But, hopefully, it won't come to that."

SECURING ZAPPA'S VAULT

FRANK ZAPPA LEFT BEHIND A SEEMINGLY ENDLESS SUPPLY OF UNRELEASED MATERIAL WHEN HE PASSED AWAY IN 1993. NOW, THERE'S THE QUESTION OF HOW TO DIG INTO THAT DEEP WELL.

BY LARSON SUTTON

LAUREL CANYON IS AN AFFLUENT hideaway neighborhood in Los Angeles, an idyllic enclave between the San Fernando Valley's suburban sprawl and the notorious glam of Hollywood's Sunset Strip. In the 1970s, the hillside haven hatched the singer-songwriter scene immortalized by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young's "Our House" and became the backdrop of the grisly Wonderland murders in 1981. For composer and avant-garde musician Frank Zappa, his wife, Gail, and their four children—Moon, Dweezil, Ahmet and Diva—it was the perfect home.

Ahmet was just a child when the clawing, gnashing machines came and devoured the family's front yard. On orders from Frank, a promising patch of green was replaced with an enormous hole earmarked for a subterranean chamber of concrete and concealment or, more precisely, the Vault.

Not long after purchasing the 1930s Tudor, Frank set out to transform part of the six-bathroom, seven-bedroom house into his personal laboratory. He constructed a rehearsal space and full recording studio, dubbed the Utility Muffin esearch Kitchen. And he built the Vault, with rows upon rows of shelving stretched wall-to-wall and floo -to-ceiling for the storage of boxes and boxes of audiotape and film, unde the most ideal of atmospheric conditions.

In music's modern parlance, the word "vault" has become a marketing dinner bell, ringing every time a record label needs source credibility for another lost track or vintage concert excavated from the rock-and-roll catacombs. It's the go-to seductive axiom—"from the vault"—luring any fan base insatiable in its desire for more pieces of the past. For the Zappas, it was the word that filled the c ater in their lawn.

"The Vault was a very exciting thing growing up in our house," says Ahmet Zappa, who is now 42. "They dug out a massive, massive climate-controlled room organized to be a safe place, under lock and key, like a library."

Frank taped everything—every session, performance, rehearsal, even casual jams at the house. If he didn't like something, then he taped over it, and by the time of his death in 1993 of prostate cancer, he had amassed decades of recordings that have served as the basis for over 100 albums from their creator. He also left behind the precarious questions of his legacy: Who would manage the Vault, and what would be done with its contents?

For a short time, Mike Keneally, a former guitarist for Frank's bands in the '80s, helped the Zappa Family Trust, directed by Gail, maintain the Vault. In 1995, the archive found its Vaultmeister in Joe Travers, a one-time drummer in Ahmet and Dweezil's band, Z. After 22 years of identifying, cataloging, transferring and preserving the trove, Ahmet suspects Travers is only halfway through the immense collection.

"It's a musical Hogwarts," Ahmet says.

Frank considered the tapes important commodities—both the finished p oducts and, more important, the raw materials. Often, he would extract sections, or select solos, from live performances and edit them into either studio takes or other concert recordings. A savant's sense of recollection fed his perfectionism.

* * *

THE GREAT ROMAN ORATOR Cicero is said to have remembered his speeches by storing them in a mind palace, accessing the words by visualizing them as parts of an imaginary room. The Vault was Frank's palace; his recall was like a human card catalog.

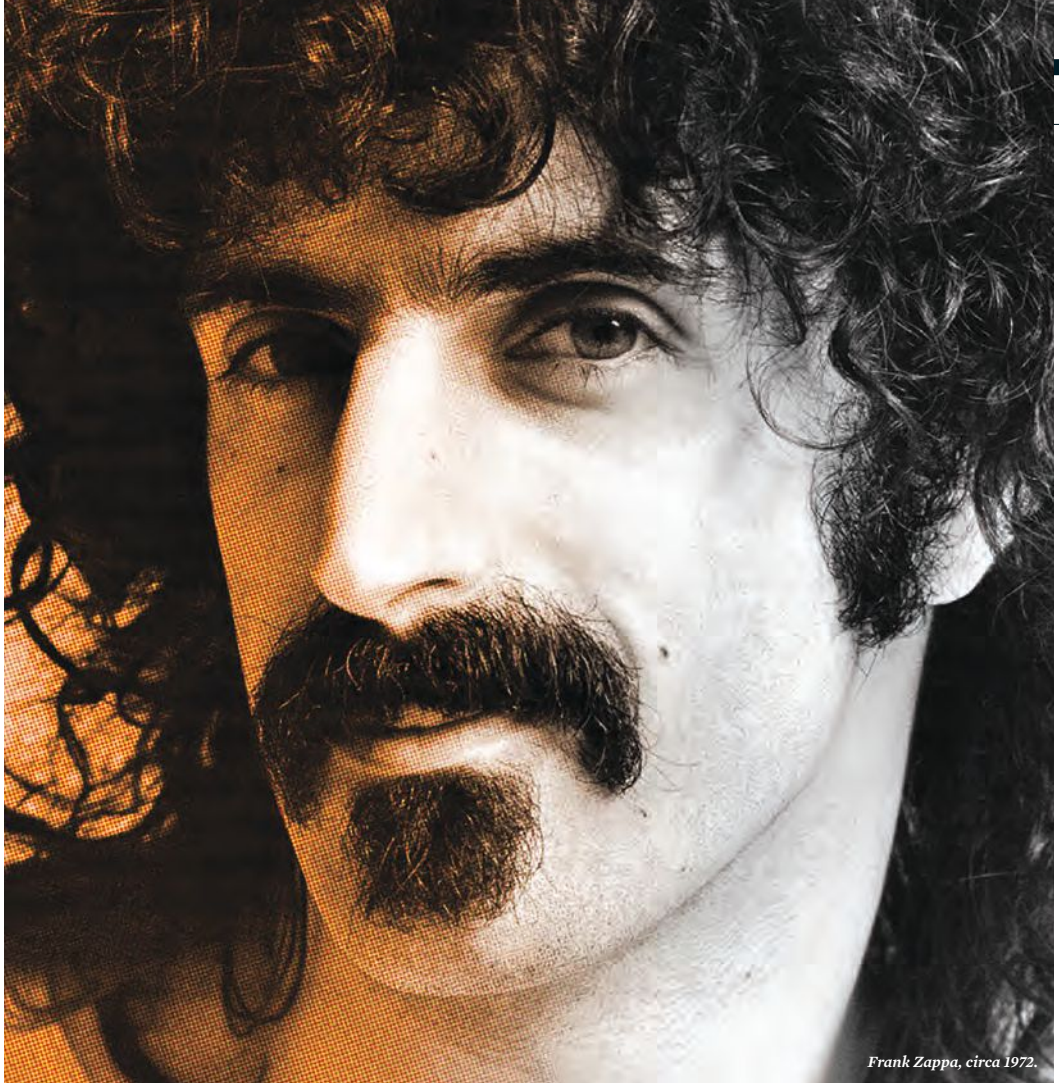
"I trip out on how he made these recordings," Ahmet says. "He was someone who could remember the room tone of the places he played, plus the tempo of the song, to be able to match these recordings from diffe ent shows together. He kept that in his mind. It's fascinating to me."

So much has changed in the 23 years since Frank's passing, most notably the ubiquity of digital information and its virtually infinite torage capabilities. The fragility of reel-to-reel tape only increases over time. "There is nothing more important than that original tape master," Travers says. However, he knows that to both utilize and preserve the music, it must be converted to a digital domain.

Travers works to transfer every note from every inch of film to a digital format at th highest available conversion rate, and, ideally, for album masters, also create an analog safety copy. And, he concedes, the technology is constantly updating, with formats often migrating, leaving him resigned to the fact that "there really is no end in sight."

Still, the real fun is in discovering and releasing the music. Ahmet and Travers view themselves as archaeologists, unearthing history one tape at a time, down to the fingerprint . "When we transfer the tape, we're looking to see if Frank left any touch points," explains Ahmet, "to see if he took anything from that tape."

As with most archaeologists, they have their quests. Some are rooted in mythology and legend; others are grounded in fact. Somewhere in the



Frank Zappa, circa 1972.

endless stacks, Ahmet says—and Travers believes—is their Holy Grail. Somewhere in one of those cardboard boxes is a tape of Frank playing with Jimi Hendrix at the house.

"I talked to Frank and Gail about that day. I was like, 'Frank and Jimi were just jamming, and they recorded that?'" says Ahmet. "We found [a tape of] Eric Clapton and Frank just jamming. I would imagine that the Jimi Hendrix recording is the same way."

Of the 100-plus releases credited to Frank Zappa, roughly 40 have come out since his passing, with the posthumous catalog under the executive control of Gail and the Zappa Family Trust. Following Gail's death in October of 2015, leadership shifted, per her wishes, to Ahmet. Among the more conspicuous recent developments is a partnership forged between Zappa Records and Universal Music Enterprises.

"Universal's really happy. We're really happy," Ahmet confirm .

"Frank Zappa is one of the most important and influentia artists in music history," says Bruce Resnikoff, president and CEO of Universal Music Enterprises. "With his legacy protected and guided by Ahmet Zappa and the Zappa Family Trust, we are privileged and look forward to collaborating and bringing his creative legacy in various forms to his new and longtime fans."

In November of last year, Universal simultaneously released a trio of albums across three formats—digital, CD and vinyl—signifying an enthusiastic and aggressive approach to the new relationship: The Mothers of Invention's *Uncle Meat* recast as *Meat Light*, a three-disc set including the original 1969 vinyl mix; *Chicago '78*, an unreleased concert recorded at the Uptown Theatre, presented in its entirety; and *Little Dots*, a sequel to *Imaginary Diseases*, featuring the 10-piece ensemble Petit Wazoo from the 1972 tour.

The *Chicago '78* show, in particular, provides an insightful look into the trials and triumphs of the process. "That was one of Gail's requests, a show from that year," says Travers.

With that instruction, he went to work. Pulling tapes from 1978, the quality of the Chicago show stood out. There were problems, however.

Tape has finite length, an needed to be changed at various points during the concert. Gaps could, and often would, occur while the band was performing. To fill these spot , Travers sought out alternatives, like a separate second tape and a mixing-board cassette, editing the three into one uninterrupted sequence—a process he outlines rather specifically in the album s liner notes.

This effort speaks to th meticulous attention to detail that the self-professed geeks Ahmet and Travers strive for in the preparation and presentation of each album.

"We raise the bar in keeping as much information available to the consumer [as possible]," says Travers. "In the audiophile world, those types of details mean a lot to people."

"I like the minutiae," says Ahmet. "I like the historical nature."

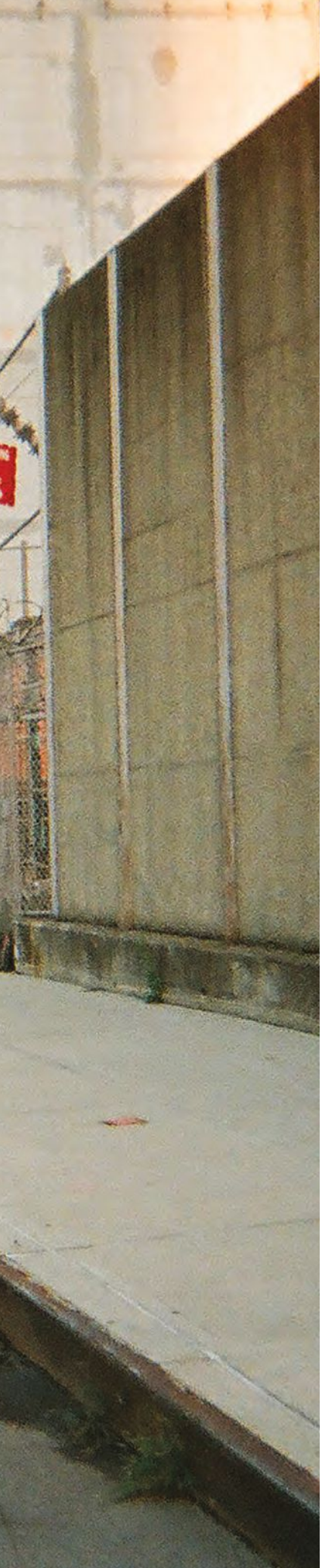
"That's why it's important that we listed where we got the other sources," Travers concludes.

Quality control is paramount. Travers laments the days he cues up a reel only to discover an engineer's poorly crafted house mix of an otherwise excellent performance. "From a historical perspective, it can be really disappointing," he explains. "The older the tapes are, the greater the chance is to not have the kind of releasable fidelity ou would expect."

Among the most challenging projects was the completion of a concert film originally intende for release four decades prior. Plagued by technical complications, *Roxy: The Movie* was filmed and ecorded over three December nights in 1973 at the famed Sunset Strip club of the same name. Simply put, an equipment failure that was not realized at the time resulted in video and audio that could not be synchronized. The tapes went into the Vault.

Frank did assemble a terrifi album, *Roxy & Elsewhere*, from the scrapped plans, but the original concept of a concert film had to ait

Continued on page 79



RABBIT TRICKS

Left to their own devices, thanks to their new label, Sleigh Bells set off on a oller-coaster ride that's equal parts melodic and robotic. BY JUSTIN JACOBS

THE MUSIC OF Sleigh Bells has been called a lot of things—abrasive, loud, brash, intense, metallic, even schizophrenic—but idyllic is certainly not one of them. The duo sounds like the clatter of the big city, the heat and pressure of millions of bodies crammed into a too-small space. So when singer Alexis Krauss talks about her upcoming move to a quiet, bucolic Upstate New York community with her fianc , mother and dog, the shift feels unnatural. But music doesn't make the musician, of course.

"I live a very simple, anonymous life," she says. "When I'm off tou , I really just want to be hiking or hanging with my dog, at home reading a book or watching Netflix. I could probably be a lot more involved in the music, nightlife and fashion of Brooklyn, but now I'm escaping all the chaos of living in the city."

She's using the weekend to box up 13 years of memories in Brooklyn, nine of which have been spent as half of one of indie rock's most unabashedly loud duos. For much of that time, Krauss has been on tour, playing tiny clubs and massive festival stages. But, at least symbolically, the move is coming at a perfect time—in many ways, Alexis Krauss is at a crossroads.

In November 2016, she and her Sleigh Bells partner, the band's guitarist and musical mad scientist Derek Miller, released their fourth album, *Jessica Rabbit*. While many experimental indie acts inch closer to a sound that becomes increasingly palatable to the masses with successive albums, *Jessica Rabbit* saw Sleigh Bells double down on their speaker-busting noise-pop. Songs change direction like a villain in a car chase. Beats chug like machine-gun fi e before giving way to delicate piano. The album is radio-pop catchy, but aggressively weird. And, after three years and countless iterations, it was finally don .

* * *

JESSICA RABBIT IS A STRANGE new beginning for Sleigh Bells, who burst out of the Brooklyn hipster underground almost seven years ago and have occupied a comfortable place between indie and electronica on the live music circuit ever since. By the spring of 2013, Alexis Krauss and Derek Miller hadn't taken a break in three full years. And they weren't about to start relaxing. The duo had dropped three albums in rapid succession, beginning with 2010's *Treats*, then *Reign of Terror* less than two years later, and *Bitter Rivals* the following fall. Each album riffed on what had quickly become Sleigh Bells' trademark sound: thunderous, overblown percussion; crushing metal-guitar riffs; and Krauss' devilish, cheerleader chanting, all tied together into fever dream blasts of noisy, aggressive pop. In three years, Sleigh Bells had grown from underground obsession to hipster gateway drug for the mainstream.

Sleigh Bells' origin story is the stuff of indi -rock legend. In 2008, Miller was waiting tables at a Brazilian restaurant in Brooklyn where Krauss and her mother happened to be eating. He'd left his metal-core band Poison the Well four years earlier, following a few scene-dominating albums in the early 2000s, and was hovering over an innovative new project. Krauss' mother broke the ice, and soon Miller was playing Krauss his *Treats* demos in a city park. He was looking for the perfect voice, and Krauss—who was working as a schoolteacher at the time—turned out to be the perfect fit, despite her unusual roots. As a teenager, she'd been a member of RubyBlue, a teen-pop girl group manufactured, *NSYNC-style, to churn out hits.

"RubyBlue burnt me out on the music industry at the age of 16," Krauss reflect . "I didn't have the desire to make music again, unless I was doing it on my own terms with a band I loved and respected."

Miller fit that criteria, and the two began recording *Treats* in his apartment. By 2009, Sleigh Bells were generating buzz in New York and posting demos on Myspace. A year later, they were the least expected but most beloved indie breakthrough of the year.

Prior to *Jessica Rabbit*, Krauss and Miller began laying down new demos with their longtime engineer Shane Stoneback during a brief reprieve from the road in 2013. They'd recently parted ways

with Mom + Pop, the indie label that had been behind them since their earliest years. Talks were swirling about Sleigh Bells joining the roster at Loma Vista Recordings, home of Andrew Bird, Local Natives and Spoon, among others. For a brief moment, it seemed like album four would slip out seamlessly at the same pace as two and three had followed one.

"It's interesting—if we had turned in an album to Loma Vista, and they said they loved it and wanted to put it out, we would have released a very diffe ent album, way, way sooner," Krauss says now. "And that would've been a mistake."

Though exciting songs were beginning to peek through, Krauss recalls that Loma Vista founder Tom Whalley encouraged them to dig deeper and explore new methods of writing. It was tough love, but Krauss and Miller were receptive—maybe even thankful for the challenge. While *Bitter Rivals* explored more lushly layered sounds than the one-two punch of Sleigh Bells' earlier records, critics had less enthusiastically received it. More than that, though, the very process of creating a Sleigh Bells song was evolving.

With each subsequent album, Krauss added more to the mix. On *Treats*, she stepped into Miller's massive songs and added vocals he'd already sketched out. By 2013, that wasn't nearly enough.

"Both of us record initial demos at home and send them to each other, then we have a conversation by texting. It's easier to let someone down that way," she admits. "But I can always tell how he's feeling about [something I wrote]. 'Really strong ideas. There's definitely a lot to ork with' means 'Try again.' But if he sends me, 'Holy shit, I can't wait to work on this,' I know there's something there."

Despite their technological—and emotional—safeguard, Sleigh Bells were becoming a true writing partnership. And they pushed each other to recognize that Loma Vista simply wasn't a fit for their loud, fiery p oject.

"As much as they wanted to open up to the idea of having someone come in, you quickly realize that this is their baby," Mike Elizondo says of the duo. "Especially Derek—this is a guy who eats, sleeps, breathes Sleigh Bells. His everything is this band. You don't wanna mess around with that."

"We parted ways with Loma Vista because our creative visions weren't aligning, and Derek and I felt like we were going back to basics," says Krauss. "We started writing and recording in his apartment again, working on songs as if it was just us now. We got totally abrasive and weird. We started working on material that was stranger, more eccentric. It felt like a rebellion. Like, 'Fuck it, we're gonna do shit how we want to do it.' And we began to recognize that we were writing an album that wasn't necessarily going to appeal to any label."

So Krauss and Miller stopped trying to appease anyone besides themselves and launched Torn Clean, their own label, as a vehicle to release their own music. The new venture allowed Sleigh Bells to be as hyper-active as they wanted,

> "Derek is incredibly restless and hard on himself. He'll make something and love it passionately and, a month later, he'll hate it just as passionately."
>
> ALEXIS KRAUSS

and, without a third party offering sugge tions, the co-songwriters burned through new possibilities.

"Derek is incredibly restless and hard on himself. He'll make something and love it passionately and, a month later, he'll hate it just as passionately," says Krauss. "We spent more time making this album and writing more songs, throwing more songs away, loving more songs. All those feelings were amplified"

Along with more narrative lyrics, Krauss was beginning to embrace the belt. The most beloved tracks on *Treats* and *Reign of Terror* featured her robotic, heavily treated vocals blending into the buzzing music like another percussion track. Yet the songs that would eventually form *Jessica Rabbit* were, by far, the most melodic that Sleigh Bells had ever written, and their lyrics were, by far, the most affectin . "I was dreaming of a dead-end street that we used to run down," howls Krauss on "Lightning Turns Sawdust Gold." "We are running around till our hearts break down; there's no need for that now. Take a deep breath before you do something drastic."

The finished t ack throws Krauss' whipping vocals on top of an echoing guitar and a squirming synth line, a military-march beat blasting along. "I wanted to create vocals that matched the instability of these tracks," she says. "Now there's an intense tension between the music and the vocals. They're not just a repetitive texture within the music. Now they're battling each other."

Elsewhere, Krauss tucked in lyrics that feel more real-world than most indie rock tends to. On the riff-heavy "Rule Number One," she's in a conversation with her number one dude: "But, Derek, it's Monday night and you're high as a kite watching *Lion King*. You can't feel a thing, but your knee hurts. Heartbeats are speeding by; it's the fight of our life. Are you proud of yourself? Are you doubting yourself?"

It was just as Krauss and Miller were indulging their weirdest musical whims that a new character with a true pop pedigree entered the picture. The split with Loma Vista had amicably dissolved before it began, but not before Whalley made an introduction that would give *Jessica Rabbit* its curves: Mike Elizondo, a producer best known for his work with 50 Cent, Dr. Dre and Eminem. As Sleigh Bells were chasing their most frenzied songs, Elizondo invited them to Can-Am, his studio in Tarzana, Calif., to give the music its shape.

Can-Am and Elizondo are names that come with history. The studio has been home to a nearly unbelievable cast of musicians: Guns N' Roses worked on *Appetite for Destruction*, Phish mixed *Hoist*, 2Pac walked the halls. But none of that mattered when Sleigh Bells arrived.

"I was already a fan," says Elizondo. "I come from a metal background, and I hadn't heard a band that combined that metal sound with hip-hop and pop like Sleigh Bells did. I was interested right away. Now, Derek and Alexis are both very bold people, in everything they do. There's just no other way for their music to come off than to sound bold."

For two musicians fie cely protective of their work—and planning to release an album on their newly minted

label—inviting a superstar pop producer to stir the pot wasn't easy. Elizondo waded carefully into the waters.

"As much as they wanted to open up to the idea of having someone come in, you quickly realize that this is their baby. Especially Derek—this is a guy who eats, sleeps, breathes Sleigh Bells. His everything is this band," says Elizondo. "You don't wanna mess around with that."

Over several sessions, though, Elizondo brought some pop-savvy to the duo's collection of wild, whirling songs. He added an extra chorus here, and provided a rewritten bridge there.

"We'd done so many versions of some of these songs, and Mike helped us lock in to what the songs needed to be," says Krauss. "Initially, we were skeptical—like, 'Can we pull this o˜ ?' [The single 'I Can't Stand You Anymore'] was almost straightforward pop. But it felt fucking good. It's a song you'd hear and want to sing along to."

Though Elizondo only has production and writing credits on a handful of *Jessica Rabbit*'s tracks, Krauss says she "can't overstate how critical he was to the album. He's very good at becoming a part of the band, not just making his mark because he should, or to claim partial ownership."

* * *

THE FINAL VERSION OF *JESSICA Rabbit* hit fans and critics by surprise when it was released. The same points that some derided, others embraced. But pretty much everyone agreed on one point: It was di˜ erent from anything you were likely to hear anytime soon.

The opening song on *Jessica Rabbit* is "It's Just Us Now," a less-than-subtle nod to Torn Clean. The number's very first sound is Miller's growling guitar—that jagged, glowing, electric tone that lit up *Treats* seven years ago. A submarine radar pings as pummelling drums punish the track and Krauss sings that, "When I'm conscious, I am cursed." All in all, it's the sound of Sleigh Bells, tried and true. But then the chorus hits, with Krauss Broadway-belting, "When you die, I wanna die with you!" and it's clear that *Jessica Rabbit*—the album that took nearly as long to create as the band's first three combined—is a brand new Sleigh Bells.

Second track "Torn Clean" is 80 seconds of shoegaze guitar and punching-bag percussion. "I Can't Stand You Anymore" launches like a pumped-up Pat Benatar anthem. "I Can Only Stare" erupts with stabs of cathedral organ synth, a syrup-slow hip-hop beat and a high-drama melody—and, somehow, still sounds like it belongs on the radio. There are pure slabs of white-hot heavy metal and dirty, industrial chugging ("Throw Me Down the Stairs"), darkly playful R&B ("Hyper Dark"), and more than one song featuring what actually sounds like automatic-weapon fire ("As If," "Unlimited Dark Paths").

The album is "a reflection of anxiety, instability, commitment and perseverance, but also the despair and hopelessness we experienced at times," says Krauss. "People either say it's a roller-coaster ride and takes you a moment to get adjusted but, if you go with it, you feel euphoric, or they say it's strange and overwhelming and disjointed. 'Get me o˜ this ride because I fucking hate it.'

"But that's very much in keeping with Sleigh Bells' past work. We're very polarizing. We've always been a band that people loved or despised," she says, knowingly. "And that's a more interesting place to be than making music that's pleasant to the masses."

THE MODERN STRING QUINTET

GREENSKY BLUEGRASS MAY HAVE EMERGED AS ONE OF THE FESTIVAL SCENE'S MOST PROMINENT STRING BANDS OVER THE PAST 15-PLUS YEARS, BUT THEY ARE STILL A MIDWEST ROCK-AND-ROLL BAND AT HEART. *By* MATT INMAN

"We're not super bluegrass people," says Anders Beck, dobro master for Greensky Bluegrass. "We're a rock-and-roll band—we just happen to do it on bluegrass instruments." Beck is calling from Nashville the afternoon after the group was forced to cancel a show in St. Louis and hightail it to Music City as the highways closed behind them due to an impending Midwest ice storm. It served as an eerie reminder of the now-established Michigan-bred quintet's hectic early touring days.

Beck, however, was not part of Greensky back in those days, when the original trio of Paul Hoffman, Dave Bruzza and Michael Bont picked up some stringed instruments and started to cut their teeth on traditional bluegrass tunes at open mics and, eventually, weekly gigs at Bell's Brewery, in their hometown of Kalamazoo, Mich. Their slow-burn rise from those casual beginnings to sold-out Red Rocks shows and a main-stage spot at Bonnaroo has allowed the band to find a comfortable niche within both the jam and string-band communities without becoming beholden to any one group of fans. Their latest effort, 2016's *Shouted, Written Down & Quoted*, produced by Los Lobos' Steve Berlin, may very well signal their arrival into the upper echelons of both scenes.

"It was a good way to keep us progressing," Bruzza, a self-described man of few words, remembers of the band's early days. "Because we played every week at our local brewery, you didn't want to play the same thing all the time."

And while Beck may not have been present at those nascent performances when the group officially formed in 2000, he has a decent guess as to how they went.

"I imagine they were pretty terrible," he half jokes. "Just like everyone who's starting out. But, eventually, it evolved into something pretty cool."

These days, Greensky Bluegrass aren't your typical string outfit, but the pull of the genre and the tradition behind it were what initially got them playing music together. "The thing that attracted us the most was the improvising and the soloing," says Hoffman, the flowing-haired de facto frontman in a group without a true leader. "It's a real player's kind of music, like being in a jazz band or something. A fiddle tune is kind of like a jazz standard—you blow the head, you improvise on the form, then you blow the head and you're done."

Bassist Mike Devol joined the group shortly after the release of their debut album in 2004, and the band's early touring efforts were limited, consisting mainly of playing the route to Asheville, N.C., and back, while somehow fitting themselves—plus an upright bass—into Hoffman's Toyota 4Runner. ("Those were the good days," Hoffman laughs.) But this still ended up breeding substantial success, culminating in Greensky winning the Telluride Bluegrass Festival's band competition in 2006 and their subsequent main-stage performance at the fest the following year. "That put a lot of wind in our sails," Hoffman says. "You know, the pat on our shoulder we needed. To know that people who had good taste liked us was encouraging—we must be doing something right."

> "We're a rock-and-roll band—we just happen to do it on bluegrass instruments."
>
> ANDERS BECK

Beck joined the full-time lineup after sitting in with the band while touring with his group The Wayword Sons, with his first official show coming on New Year's Eve 2007 at Kalamazoo's State Theatre. Since then, Greensky have ramped up their evolution, embracing an ever-solidifying place on the live-music circuit and always looking to increase the instrumental proficiency that playing traditional bluegrass instilled in them. As Hoffman puts it: "You gotta learn the rules to break them."

"Pushing boundaries was definitely something we all came to together," Bruzza says. "Anders has been in the band for 10 years now, and we've all progressed together along those lines of open themes. Improvisation has always been important, but more so in the later years. We've definitely expanded on that."

Bruzza, Beck, Devol, Hoffman and Bont in f ont of a sold-out crowd at Red Rocks, July, 23, 2016.

Dean Budnick

* * *

AS GREENSKY BLUEGRASS' original compositions mounted, the "trad-grass" tunes began to fall by the wayside a bit, opening the door for the extended improvisations that highlight the band's current live show. "Early on, when we were doing bluegrass, we realized that so much of it is so similar," Hoffman says. "We used to play these three-hour shows, and when we were playing all bluegrass songs that are three minutes long, that was lot of goddamn songs. I remember being like, 'Why don't we just play one bluegrass song for twice as long, instead of playing two songs that are exactly the same?' And that's kind of where our improvisation was born."

With a collective proficiency now worthy of any genre from classical to heavy metal, Greensky's improvisations continue to awe and inspire audience after audience, and that isn't an accident. These guys are trying to *jam*—even though they might not fully embrace the questionable moniker of "jamgrass."

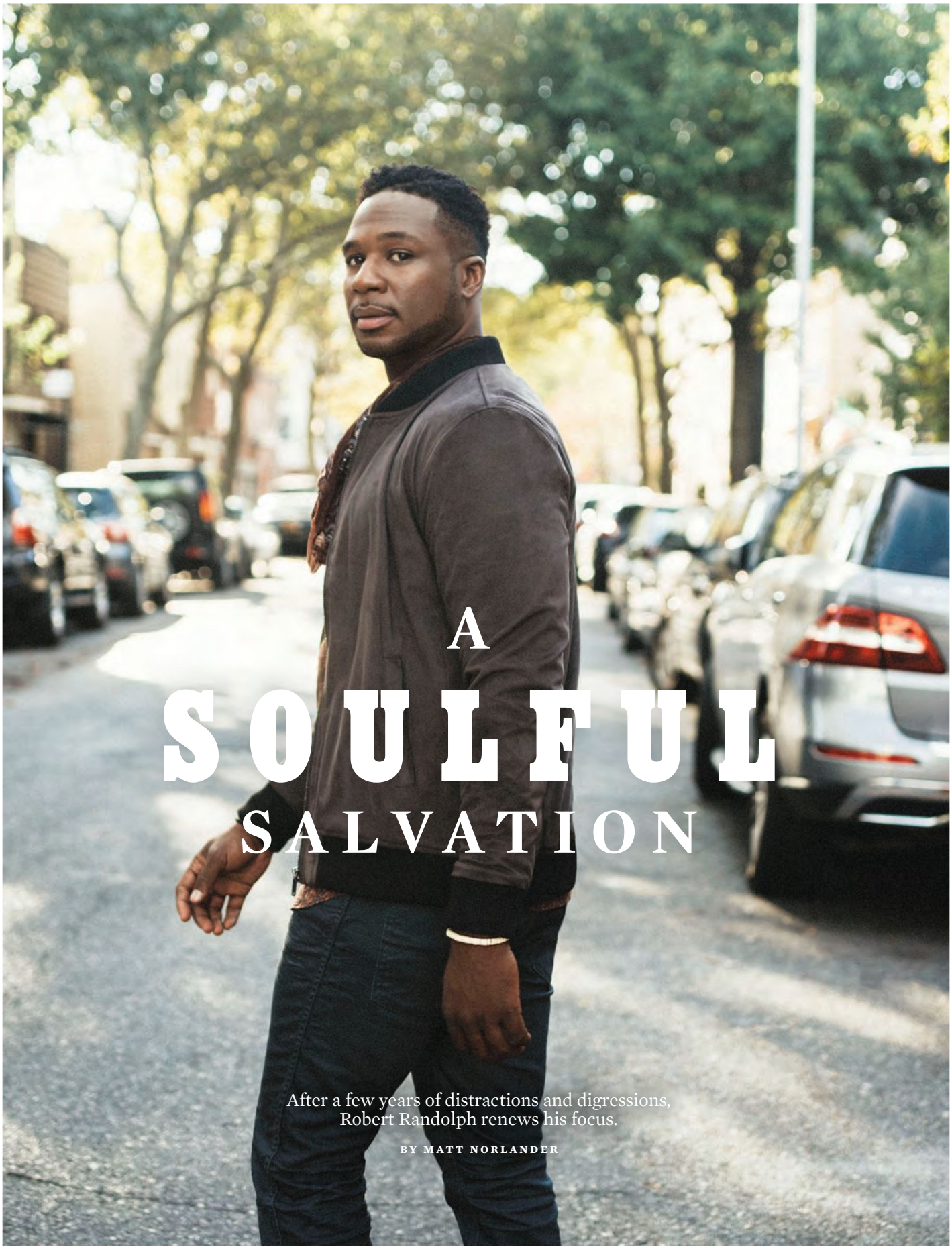
"There's certainly times when, all of the sudden, we're playing a song for 20 minutes," Beck admits. "And as long as it's interesting, that's cool, but if it's jamming just for the sake of jamming, that's not cool. Jamming for the sake of real improvisation is what we're going for. We're trying to go to different places each night."

That's not to say that the storied tradition of bluegrass doesn't include its own form of jamming, and Greensky's members are quick to acknowledge the master instrumentalists who have come before them and who continue to amaze while sticking to traditional 'grass.

"In bluegrass, all the instruments solo and improvise," Hoffman says. "Everyone's got an important role that is simultaneously a soloist and part of the rhythmic structure of the music. That's why it's kind of funny—the whole 'bluegrass jamband' thing. Bluegrass is always jamming. That's what people figure out when they like a band like us first, and then they go back and listen to Del McCoury records. And they never thought they'd like it, but Ronnie and Robbie [McCoury] and Jason [Carter] rip solos that shred on every song! All of a sudden, they figure that out and they're like, 'What?!'"

There are always inherent risks to experimentation,

Continued on page 78



A SOULFUL SALVATION

After a few years of distractions and digressions, Robert Randolph renews his focus.

BY MATT NORLANDER

WHEN ROBERT RANDOLPH LEFT the church, some called him the devil.

A squeaky wheel in high school, Randolph, now 38, was nonetheless a pedal-steel guitar prodigy who, more importantly, was determined to take the music he grew up with and turn it back on the world. His African-American Pentecostal place of worship, the House of God Church, was built on gospel music; the denomination was dominated by euphony. Almost 80 years ago, when black churches couldn't acquire organs, a simpler, smaller instrument was substituted: pedal-steel guitar. The whimper and wail of the strings made for a fine imitation of a singing voice. From this, over the decades, "sacred steel" became the church's signature sound.

But the church insisted that sound stay inside—and the hardcores didn't want Randolph to leave the House. Some of his heroes had been browbeaten into keeping their talents within the radius of the church's reach, only playing at services, conventions and in other places of worship across the East Coast and South. Randolph didn't care about their insistence on resistance. He stepped out, with a defiant but positive attitude. He wanted to be like his idols but didn't want to be contained the way they were.

"For me, I saw it much more as a worldwide thing," Randolph says. "Like, the world needs to hear this music, this sound. And they'd say, 'Aw, man, you the devil, man. Where you going?'"

The church isn't shallow on influences and arti ts. Amazingly, Randolph developed his talent while hardly knowing anything about the mainstream. The only music he listened to until his late teens was Michael Jackson and gospel.

"Almost all of the music [Robert Randolph & The Family Band makes] comes, in some way, from our church's library," Randolph says. "There's more tapes of church music that we could listen to than there are hours of Grateful Dead music we could listen to. My musical library, from watching Lorenzo Harrison, Ted Beard, Calvin Cooke—all of these guys were some of the best musicians. They would have been stars, but the thing about our church is it is a very strict church. They couldn't leave because they would've been criticized. They would've been silenced, all these other nonsense things. For any artist that comes from a church—Aretha Franklin, Sam Cooke, Sly Stone—all those guys have been scrutinized. It's like, 'Hey, you're the devil.' I didn't give one rat's ass. It didn't bother me. Not much bothers me other than my own failures."

At the top of Randolph's list of failures is all the music he's flounde ed on recording. He's annoyed by the thinness of his discography. It's time that he'll never get back. That's going to change. It's taken Randolph 15 years, but he says he's about to hit the most potent, creative era of his life.

"My failure would be not recording enough music, which ain't going to happen anymore," he says. "If you look at it, man, I came to the scene in 2001, and I got enough music to put out a new record every fi e months now. That's just one of those things where I'm glad being back with Red Light [Management], with Sony—they understand. Miles Davis, Hendrix, The Beatles—that's what they used to do. That's what we're here for."

* * *

ROBERT RANDOLPH & THE Family Band released their fifth tudio album, *Got Soul,* on Feb. 17. If Randolph gets his way, then this will kick off a period, over the next decade, of releasing albums every 14-18 months. That's a pace mostly unmatched in contemporary music, but it's welcome news for Randolph's dedicated fan base, which has been craving a new album from his Family Band for four years. A boon: The group should find a wider audience, thanks to *Got Soul*. This album is their shortest—but most imaginative—one yet, and it will be pressed to vinyl in addition to being available for streaming and download on every mainstream digital music service.

Randolph has an optimism bolstered by his hard-line intention not to rest. He's done messing around. After 2013's *Lickety Split*, the pedal-steel guitarist was sidetracked by good intentions. He switched managers, then went back to Red Light Management, and eventually signed with Sony Masterworks for *Got Soul*. But it was his desire to help out his hometown area of Irvington, N.J. that actually waylaid him the most. For years, Randolph tried to help build a community arts center that would help kids and teens. He attended meeting after meeting. He even brought James Dolan, the owner of the New York Knicks and CEO of Cablevision, to the town council. He had the infrastructure and ideas ready. He also had billionaire Paul Allen willing to back the project.

"You wonder why all the crimes are happening in these towns and in these cities. It's because there's no music and art outlets for these kids anymore," Randolph says. "So what the hell else are these kids supposed to do? You tell kids to go to school for math, science and English. That doesn't benefit everybody. Diffe ent things expand people's brains and minds. As long as I'm helping kids—inner-city kids, the less fortunate, black, white, Latino, whatever. I know what music does for kids. It's therapeutic. It opens up the brain, opens up the mind, opens up your heart. If it's not an instrument, maybe it's a dancer or a poet or art. Communication is music."

Randolph remains frustrated; he's the latest talent to come out of the area who was unable to win this type of battle. Queen Latifah, Wyclef Jean, Lauryn Hill, Redman, Naughty By Nature, professional athletes and successful producers in the music business: They all emerged from a 10-mile radius around East and West Orange, N.J., and, despite their effort , none of them have found a consistent footing in improving the neighborhoods through long-lasting community programs.

"They've all failed," Randolph says. "It doesn't matter for me. I just like to help future kids, inner-city churches, you know, because the church is where I learned this God-given gift."

The passion project stifled his music making.

"People would call me and, I'd be like, 'Leave me alone, I'm at this school meeting. I'm at this town board meeting,'" Randolph says. "Week after week. And then you figu e out a whole year and a half, two years, went by and these people have been jerking me around."

Now, Randolph will travel to cities and communities around the country and donate to places committed to building up their neighborhoods by bolstering their arts scenes. He's given thousands of dollars and, in the past few years, made appearances in Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, Illinois and California.

"There's a lot of things that make communities work," Randolph says. "Churches don't do anything to help kids these days. I'm very critical of the government. Trust me, these churches ain't Republican. We're at a time right now where a lot of people need to step up. Yeah, Trump is cutting budgets, but churches make billions of dollars per year, and where does that money go? I ain't no Trump fan. I really wasn't no Hillary fan either, but I am a Democrat. It's just time a lot of people step up. It's why we wrote 'Be the Change' and 'Gonna Be Alright.' Those songs, and the album, have a message of how we can help each other. Because there's a lot going on in the world, and a lot of people are stuck in

Randolph performing with his supergroup The Word at Port Chester, NY's Capitol Theatre, 5/1/14.

Dean Budnick

complacency and just act like it's not there."

* * *

WHEN ROBERT RANDOLPH BLEW the lid off the Grammys in 2004, former high-school teachers contacted his parents, surprised to see him on television.

They thought he might well have been dead by then.

Randolph stumbled through high school, and then his life consisted of three focal points: church, playing music and gambling. He loved poker and blackjack. He'd win, burn through money, win, burn through more money.

"One day, it was just like, 'I don't even like this anymore,'" Randolph says. "What's the point?"

Randolph's meteoric rise from the sanctity of the church to sharing stages with legends like Carlos Santana, Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy and Dave Matthews Band is well known within the music world. What's not is the devil-talk he faced as a teenager, followed by his unlikely leap from a law office to main f tival stages. Randolph got a mailroom job at 17. Eventually, an attorney at a nearby firm as ed if he'd like to work there. Within seven months, Randolph, who never considered going to college, was an assistant paralegal. By 2001, when he had just turned 22, he was making $65,000 per year and buying alligator-skin shoes and dapper suits.

Then, he gave it up.

"All of a sudden, I told them, 'I'm going to quit and be a musician,'" Randolph says. "They [the lawyers] had no idea. 'What the hell? We didn't even know you played music.'"

It was the summer of 2001. One of the lawyers at the firm g ve Randolph a check for $2,500, just to keep him stabilized early on.

Flash-forward 15 years: Randolph is playing a gig in Morristown, N.J., in the summer of 2016. A typical melting-pot audience of Randolph's fans includes a handful of white guys with AARP cards, one of them approaching 80 years old—all of them are lawyers, former colleagues of one of the most recognizable guitar talents in the world.

"It wasn't money," Randolph says. "It was what was fun. What did I love to do? Music is kind of what got me here. I grew up in rough neighborhoods in Jersey, so music was my outlet in getting out of that. When an agent called me up, I think I was more excited to go to California—because I had never been. That someone would pay me to go to California and play music? OK, let's do this."

* * *

RANDOLPH TEAMED UP WITH producer Matt Pierson for *Got Soul*, and the results provide a tight punch with a typically uplifting Family Band groove and verve. It feels like a collaborative effor between artistic ideas and a veteran producer's editorial instincts. Randolph's Family, most notably his sister Lenesha and cousin Marcus, are more prominent on this record than on any prior one. Darius Rucker guests, naturally, on "Love Do What It Do," while R&B songster Anthony Hamilton adds a great touch to "She Got Soul." Snarky Puppy's Cory Henry hops on to help during the Sam & Dave classic "I Thank You," which Pierson pitched to Randolph as a cover-song option.

Pierson, who was part of Randolph's fir t record-deal signing nearly 15 years ago, intended to keep the LP exploratory but tight. It's a streamlined 45-minute listen. His goal of getting to the element of The Family Band's sound, without drowning in their potential, was the other challenge.

"It's this space that exists between soul, R&B, funk, gospel and jamband," Pierson says. "There's a place in there that's Robert. I don't view it as he's combining all of those. It's that he is one-of-a-kind and can appeal to all of those other genres. Making a recording, I thought it was important to focus on what Robert's really all about. If we focused on that, then each of those audiences would connect with it. Obviously, it's a level of virtuosity on a rare instrument. There's this sound of that guitar that's undeniable."

Pierson and Randolph started with a roster of 22 songs, eventually cutting it down to nine before writing a few more, including "Love Do What It Do," which Randolph composed with bandmates on a screened-in porch in Nashville while recording the album. Randolph almost asked Chris Stapleton to sing on it, but figu ed Rucker's voice fit the song bette , and it was the last tune he picked to be on the LP. They did most of the recording at New York City's Sear Sound. Pierson says the rhythm tracks were finished in th ee days' time and, in total, the album was recorded and overdubbed in less than two weeks, a process that ran counter to most of Randolph's previous studio sessions. Pierson believes more takes lead to lesser returns. He doesn't belabor the process. The album's solo piece, "Heaven's Calling," was a happy accident, something that Randolph was warming up on before Pierson realized he had a worthy moment that fit in the middl of the album.

"He played for maybe fi e minutes, and it got to this moment where it's like, 'This is ridiculous,'" Pierson says. "I hope this is a record for those who know about Robert to say, 'Ah, this is the record I've been wanting from him.' If you knew about Robert, this is the one you've been wanting. If you didn't know about him, this is the perfect introduction."

Randolph feels settled, finall . He openly admits to missteps over the past six or seven years.

"Like most artists, we all make dumb decisions, and there's a lot of good people there," Randolph says of his relationship with Red Light. "Coran Capshaw, Bruce Flohr, my current manager, Jonathan Azu. We know how to talk to each other when we get angry with each other, so it's all great. I'm happy to be back there with those guys and have their support. It's funny to come sort of full circle. Anybody who's followed my career would understand I've met so many important people and, you know, sometimes you can sort of lose yourself. I mean you can kind of get out of it because one thing artists do is we look at the charts and say, 'Why the hell is Gary Clark Jr. more famous than me right now? Why the hell is Train?' I'm just naming names. It can get you out of who you are. For me, no matter what I'm trying to do, it will revert to Robert Randolph & The Family Band: an inspiration, a rock-blues crossover guy who produces uplifting, positive music that comes from within."

Randolph already has a list of collaborators he wants to work with soon: Trey Anastasio, Zac Brown, Dave Grohl, Red Hot Chili Peppers. This should be the start of his abundant period, if you will, and he's still humble about the work.

"You make the mistake of saying, 'We made it,' [and] you kind of get complacent," Randolph says. "Making it, to me, is if I'm in the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame one day. That's it."

As the conversation comes to a close, Randolph looks ahead to an evening of rehearsing and laying down demos—the usual.

"Ain't no such thing as taking a break from music for me, man. Not no more."

I REALLY, TRULY STILL LOVE YOU, NEW YORK

On the heels of a few difficult ears, Ryan Adams returns to the Big Apple to reclaim his raw spirit—and record a deeply personal LP.

BY MIKE GREENHAUS

BLACK & WHITE IS LOCATED ON A NONDESCRIPT STREET in New York's East Village, just south of Union Square's mall-like glaze and a few avenues west of the long-gentrified squalor that gave birth to the city's original DIY movement. In many ways, it's one of Manhattan's last old-school, TV-less rock-and-roll bars; the type of watering hole that hosts poet-friendly open-mic nights and where an indie darling can spin old soul records anonymously while the occasional art collective meets next to a portly barfly with equal cred. It's also a place where authenticity trumps popularity, from punk to funk, and where Ryan Adams can still get gently scolded by a bartender, with a distinct Ronnie Wood quality, for breaking his "no Neil Young" rule by practicing "Cinnamon Girl" on his acoustic guitar.

The bar is an older-brother venue in a family of nightlife establishments run by Johnny T. Yerington—one of Adams' closest friends and his occasional drummer—and, when he's in New York, the Los Angeles-based Adams likes to hang around its basement. There's something about playing with Yerington that allows Adams to access his rawest songwriting emotions, and though *Prisoner*—his fir t LP since his high-profile divorce from actress/singer Mandy Moore—was partially inspired by the '80s bangers he listens to when he runs, it also feels very punk rock.

"I could feel that it was going to happen when I saw Johnny," Adams says of the November 2014 trip that laid the seeds for his 16th album. "I was in New York playing Carnegie Hall and, just being back here, I got really inspired."

COUGH COUGH!
WEYLAND-YUTANI CORP
A&M
STEREO
RECORDING

It's a cold afternoon at the tail end of 2016, and Adams is currently camped out a few blocks from Black & White at Electric Lady Studios, between international dates with his new backing band and a quick trip to Pennsylvania for the holidays. Jimi Hendrix, who lived four blocks north when he died, originally envisioned Electric Lady as something of his urban garage, yet it's Adams who has truly turned the now-iconic Greenwich Village studio into his sonic lab during his wild ride from North Carolina-bred folk wunderkind to New York indie icon and LA studio cat, and then back again.

"I was inspired to get back here for a couple diffe ent reasons but, mainly, in that little bit of time I had in the city, I really felt alive," Adams admits as he lounges in Electric Lady's Studio A, wearing a Motörhead sweatshirt over a fitted atman tee. "I was pretty down and not feeling it in my personal life, and then, all of a sudden, being around old friends, I started to light up. The energy of this place was really conducive to remembering who I was. I had been in LA for a long time before that, and it was fin — but it was a diffe ent life. There was a stress on me—not just from touring but from life—that I couldn't have alleviated if I hadn't had the experience of coming here when I did. Plus, there are a few legit modern pinball places nearby and I liked a girl here, so I was like, 'Fuck it.'"

* * *

PRISONER, WHICH WAS released in mid-February, is the emotional exclamation point at the end of Adams' marriage to Moore and signals the start of his next phase as a songwriter and bandleader. In early 2009, around the time of his wedding, Adams broke up The Cardinals—the cosmic-cowboy group that made him an unexpected Deadhead favorite—and temporarily retired from the road while he battled Ménière's disease (an inner-ear disorder that causes vertigo and can lead to tinnitus). He moved to Los Angeles and hunkered down at home—releasing the metal album *Orion* and two collections of poetry—but, for the fir t time since he helped popularize alt-country in the late '90s with Whiskeytown, Adams flew under the adar.

After an 18-month break that felt much longer at the time, he started dipping his toes back into the live arena in late 2010 and returned to the road the next year for a solo acoustic run supporting his then-new record, *Ashes & Fire*. By 2014, Adams finally felt healthy enough to put together The Shining—a full, electric band—and wrote and released a self-titled album with the help of his new guitarist, Mike Viola. But he continued to struggle with Ménière's on the road.

"It happens after planes and stuff," Adams says of his condition. "At some point on the last tour, I suffe ed a pretty horrific episod . Most of my energy is being spent just staying upright onstage for those two hours. I can exercise and do things to keep myself going at that pace and stay fi — stay level—but there are times when my adrenals just crap out. The stress of the tour... I was really enjoying the tour, but we were hitting it pretty hard. There was stuff in y life at the time—being in the stages leading up to a divorce—and, for more information on that stress level, watch any TBS movie. But all the clichés about divorce are real, whether you play guitar or not. So that stuff was all adding up, and I had a really bad Ménière's episode. I've done a lot of hypnotherapy for it because I don't want to regulate the pain. I just want to deal with it in a [Henry] Rollins way. But I couldn't deal, so I needed a break."

On Jan. 23, 2015, Adams and Moore announced the end of their marriage in a joint statement, and the couple legally parted ways the following year. While Adams has weathered his share of celebrity romances, the divorce and an alimony claim related to their pets dragged him deep into the gossip columns. He continued to write and record through the pain, releasing a complete, surprisingly sincere re-creation of Taylor Swift's *1989* in late 2015, and working at both Electric Lady and his PAX-AM studio in LA whenever possible.

"It was the fir t break I'd had in a long time, where I'd seen a doctor and they said, 'You're fucking exhausted; you're tense,'" Adams says of the period after his episode. "I wasn't sleeping, I had severe compression in my ears and I just couldn't alleviate it. I was still playing fin , so they gave me some medicine to try and relax and calm me, and told me to rest. It was the fir t minute I'd had to just chill the fuck out. I also got into PlayStation right around that time, and it's the fir t time I actually got into edibles."

Adams says that the video game *Mad Max* helped him manage his Ménière's, but he still clearly had a lot on his mind; he'd been struggling to write on the road for a few album cycles. Eventually, he started seeing a hypnotherapist named Kerry Gaynor to help him stop smoking and figu e out why he "felt so lost, trapped and disconnected" while making *Ashes & Fire*.

"I lost a lot of mojo at the end of The Cardinals, and then it remained lost for a long time out in LA until I worked with Kerry," Adams says. "He figu ed out, through our conversations, that I had become disenchanted with the way music was going. I was so offended that people weren't interested in records anymore that, on some really crazy, unconscious level, I felt like this thing that I risked my whole life to be involved in was somehow gonna go away."

Though Adams is a fan of certain elements of the current wave of "adventurous pop music," he still has a sense of humor about it. He sarcastically recounts hearing Rihanna's robotic vocals—"screaming, 'Having sex with me is amazing'"—blaring out of a jewelry store at an airport while he walked by. Suddenly, he says, he was nostalgic for the days when he'd complain about elevator music.

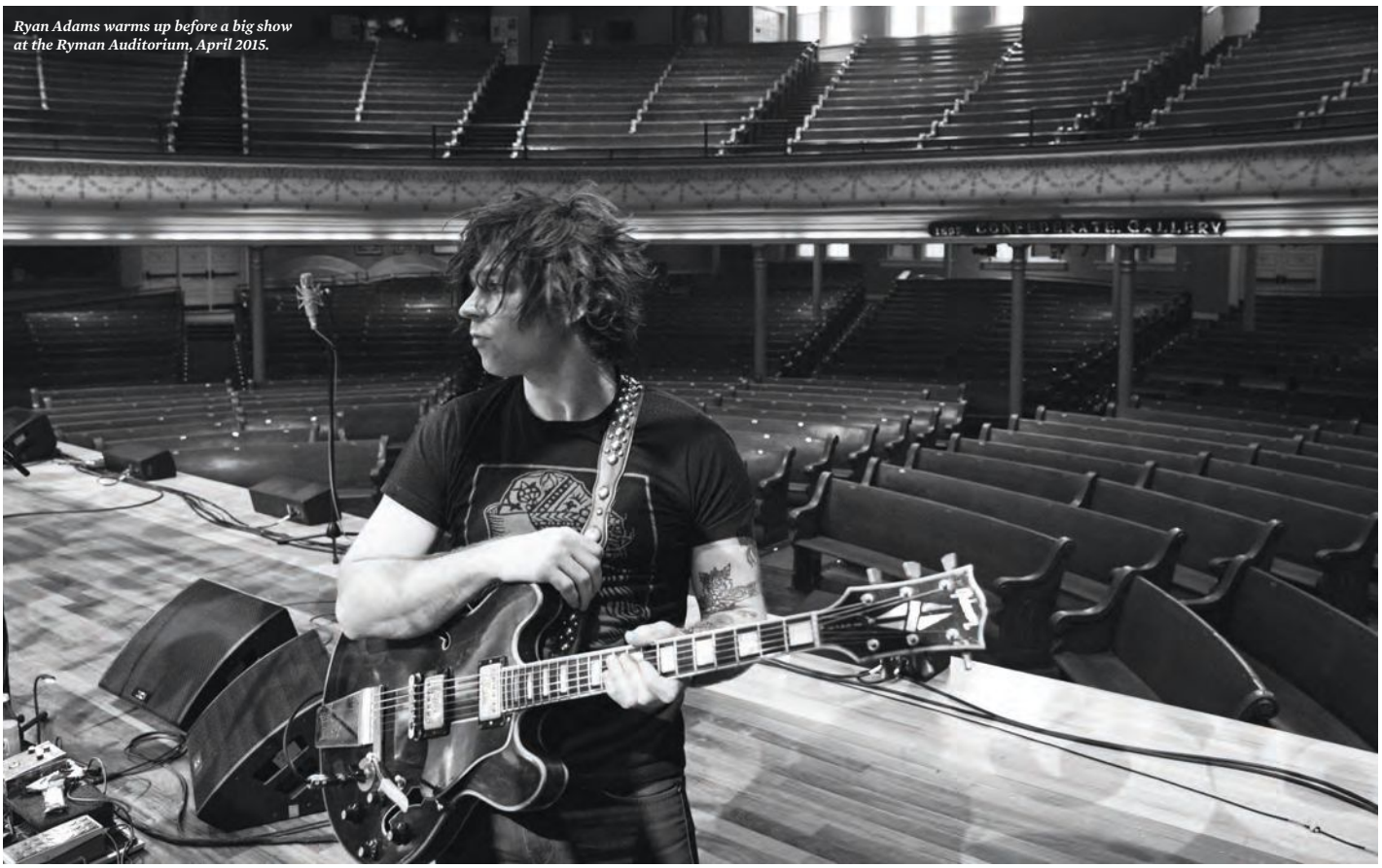
"So I couldn't write anymore," he continues. "I loved to play guitar, but it hurt my feelings to do it. So that bitter seed was growing this horrible thing in me. [Kerry] said to me: 'You're gonna pick up the guitar and you're gonna remember what it was like when you were 15-16 years old, when it didn't mean anything to you.' It's so hard to get back to that but I did and, ever since that happened, I've never felt so fucking good about something in my life. I just felt so optimistic."

Finally, after struggling to scribble down ideas in his notebook for months, the floodgates opened. The spars , tender, saxophone-assisted "Tightrope" and the emotional shuffle Outbound Train" poured out on the road; "Prisoner" was sparked on a bus ride while Viola was playing with a guitar riff in the f ont lounge.

"Then I was like, 'Holy shit, I gotta go to the studio,'" Adams says. "So I did what any other person would never do. We had, like, two weeks off, and I called Johnny T. and I called this place [Electric Lady], and got on a plane and we started recording."

Much of *Prisoner* was recorded live and, between takes, Adams and Yerington would run through hardcore and punk songs to take a breather from the "heartbreak material" they were producing. "We play for fun, but Ryan is always working toward a goal—it always means something," Yerington says. "Ryan had a lot to say and a lot on his mind. I felt, from the fir t song, 'Dive,' that we were starting something that would be the next Ryan record."

Adams popped into Electric Lady between tour dates throughout the next two years and threw his emotions into his songwriting. In total, he came up with a "business number" of 80-85 songs, 12 of which made it onto *Prisoner*, and a slew of ideas that are still boiling. "I wanted to come back here [to New York] and make music,"



Ryan Adams warms up before a big show at the Ryman Auditorium, April 2015.

Adams says earnestly, noting how strange it feels to be at Electric Lady for a day of press instead of recording. "I met somebody that was cool as hell and I just wanted to hang out. The conveniences of what I had in LA didn't match against 'I'm going to jam with my best friend every day and go hang out and live my life—refuel and live.' The parallels to *Easy Tiger* [released in 2007 as Adams was sobering up and stabilizing his life] are crazy because I used to live one block from [Electric Lady], and I just came here every day and basically stayed in the studio for a year. But in this situation, I was still on tour and started living here [in New York] out of a bag and one drawer. That's what happens when I get into that environment."

In the late '90s, Adams and Yerington met through fellow East Village musician and nightlife tastemaker Jesse Malin. Adams frequented their bar Niagara during the blurry period documented in his hit "New York, New York" and, after learning that Yerington had a rehearsal space nearby, they started jamming and making 4-track recordings. Though he says he has friends who still don't believe him that he's actually on *Prisoner*, Yerington has been involved in every one of Adams' New York records in some way, including the manic *Rock n Roll*, an early version of *Ashes & Fire* and several side projects of varying levels of seriousness. He says they have "mountains of recorded stuff no one has ever heard," like an unreleased album called *Blackhole*. "We always have a good time together and there is just a common trust between us. We have a certain telepathy when we play," says Yerington. "We aren't afraid to get stupid."

Adams admits that writing and recording his past two records were such long, involved processes that he actually took a break from listening to music, except for when he was running. His self-curated playlists offer a mix of material—from Black Flag's *My War*, Alice in Chains' *Dirt* and Robert Plant's "Big Log" to less expected '80s influence , like Bruce Hornsby's polished work with The Range and Don Henley's ubiquitous hit "The Boys of Summer."

"The stuff I li ten to when I run is the truth; that's the shit that I love," Adams says. Those sounds started to creep into his approach as well. As Adams worked through issues in his personal life, his sound started to morph.

"I started with this big, raw, rumbling, nasty, love machine, desire snowball rolling down fucking Divorce Mountain," Adams says. "That's who I was. That's not a put-on. I'm a musician, a guitar player, a songwriter. I've never read a Bukowski book where he didn't have something to say. There's not a Henry Miller book called 'Just Fuckin' Around With the Typewriter.' I have legitimate stuff to s y because of what I have been through in my life. People have died around me. There's a way of processing the world that can be beautiful and romantic, and I got to these songs and this process by starting in this way by necessity. If I were in a video game of my own life, then I leveled up so fast after those fir t songs."

Despite any connotations associated with the word "prisoner," Adams is adamant that the album's title track—a lover's lament protectively encased in a relatively chirpy pop song—captures his newfound feeling of freedom. "That's just a love song that talks about how ridiculous it is to capture yourself in bullshit expectations—and unnecessary expectations about who you really are and what you really feel—but have an extraordinary amount of desire left in you for life and for things that are on the periphery. You're basically only prisoner to yourself," he says. "There's a lot of concepts in Buddhism, Taoism, that we're all mentally captive to the things that we think we want—those deeper, intrinsic pleasures. It could be love or sex or art or adventure.

"But for the most part, a lot of people will hold themselves captive, whether it's to a job or their attitude. It's that thing

"It's like a mirror," Adams says of his new, personal album. "That's what that whole record, the entire body of tunes, is actually about."

where people go, 'I smoked pot and I had the worst panic attack and I'll never smoke again!' Once in a while, if you live long enough, you hear someone say that and you think, 'Did you try sativa?' or 'Did you get a good look at yourself?' Because imagine Mike Pence getting real fucking high and thinking about the shit that he says. He would go, 'Oh, my God. I'm a living monster.' And then he'd have to change. It's like a mirror. That's what that whole record, the entire body of tunes, is actually about."

Prisoner is not a total departure from Adams' previous work, but it does contain some unexpected flourishe . Lead track "Do You Still Love Me?" opens with an organ invocation, "Shiver and Shake" includes a wash of synths, and "Tightrope" fades into an outro that would fit snugly on a Range ecord. "Haunted House," a number that Adams tried out during a few shows with jamgrass veterans The Infamous Stringdusters and Nicki Bluhm last summer, might be the album's darkest selection—a spooky personal meditation that is more therapy session than Halloween spook.

A hallmark of 1980s recordings is the contrast between big, processed, synthetic production and dark Cold War-esque lyrical themes. Adams thought a lot about that approach while he was working through his own difficu period, and he absorbed some of the Reagan-era studio techniques Peter Wolf explored with Big Country and Jefferso Starship. He's even discovered a newfound beauty in revisiting urgent songwriters like Bruce Springsteen and Tears for Fears in the confines of 1980s adio. (The 1990s is now where he feels production "gets weird.") He's also been listening to some of the Grateful Dead's own more manicured late-'70s studio work, like *Terrapin Station*, and applauds their studio craftsmanship, apart from the "the MIDI stuff," he says, "which makes me want to puke."

"*Skull & Roses*, for me, is like reading *The Hobbit*; you don't need to go any further than the black-typeface words on the white page to get yourself to that mountain," he explains in Deadhead terms. "But sonically, by the time you get to *Terrapin Station*, I envision this physical space when I close my eyes."

He scans the "live room" where he's spent so many nights working on ideas and admits that he's started to think of his diverse influences as hi own "radio station, my own reference area." The *1989* cover project wasn't a direct link to *Prisoner*, however, Adams sees Swift as an ultimate example of a personal songwriter able to mesh over-the-top production and radio-ready pop hooks with incredibly unique arrangements. He decided to cover her album on a whim during one of countless PAX-AM recording sessions and the tribute was something of a low-pressure crossover for him; he's still pumped that Swift was excited about it.

In addition to her own move from country to Top 40 at the height of her career, he thinks it was "super cool and ballsy" that the biggest pop star in the world released an album with a Polaroid of herself wearing a sweatshirt as the cover, with just a pair of initials listed instead of her name.

"Taylor Swift is really famous, but she's also just a bro: She'll write the hell out of a song," he says. "Talk about somebody that can really get under someone's nails in a song. We're all just human beings and we're all going through diffe ent levels of whatever relationships we have with each other. And they're always gonna be complex, and there's always gonna be tons of duplicity and mystery. That's why songs that are political to songs that are personal are all interrelated and fun, and even sometimes funny to listen to."

* * *

ALONG WITH *PRISONER*, ADAMS has marked this new stage of his career by putting together another group, featuring Grace Potter & The Nocturnals guitarist Benny Yurco, drummer Nate Lotz, bassist Charlie Stavish and keyboardist Ben Alleman, who Adams calls "Lieutenant Mahoney," as if he were a "really spaced-out Vietnam veteran." (Stavish, who worked with Adams as an engineer at Electric Lady a decade ago, is the only holdover from The Shining.) Adams had envisioned The Shining as "The Smiths meets Eddie & The Cruisers," and says that "there was never any negative stuff in The Shining inte -band, but there were definitely bi personalities that eclipsed each other." He didn't intend to form a new band, but he admits that "the truth about what it's like to work with adults" is that you eventually lose your collaborators to steadier opportunities. And, last year, several members of The Shining, who have families and are hovering around middle age, decided to veer off the oad.

"Though I was going through a divorce and was frantic, or some days just had upsetting things to deal with, I was trying to run that band and navigate that show," Adams says. "There are aspects to divorce that go far beyond the emotional—that are fucking horrible, that cause major problems. And some of that

stuff is ju t really upsetting, and you have to work through it, so I was really inundated with that. [The members of The Shining] were in their own worlds. We were bros, we were all fin —nobody ever really had a problem—but at the end of the day, those guys were getting up there and weren't in a place where they really cared about crossing the globe to play. And I fucking live to play."

Adams considers this latest ensemble a true, new *band* with their own arrangements of his extensive catalog—not "The Shining Part 2." The Shining "basically got together by happenstance," he says, through their work with Moore. The fir t time the trio of Adams, Viola and keyboardist Daniel Clarke wrote a song together, "White on Rice," was by accident during an early backstage hang.

"[Mandy] called it. She was like, 'You guys are gonna be in a band together one day,'" Adams says. "They also were really pretty bold, stepping into that role of me having a band again, and dealt with audiences expecting a certain sound and being compared to The Cardinals."

Oddly enough, Adams spent his barnstorming years trying to shed his Whiskeytown tag in hopes of building a new project with its own identity, only to end up creating a band with a fanbase that's just as hard to appease. "One out of every thousand people on my Instagram feed will say, 'Bring back The Cardinals,' and I don't respond because my actual response would be like, 'Which fucking version?'" he says. "I didn't like any version of The Cardinals besides the fir t one. People go, 'It's not cool when you dislike the Neal Casal-era Cardinals!' And I'm like, 'Well, I only wrote all the fucking songs! So maybe I am actually [allowed] to say that they suck.' And also, Brad [Pemberton, the drummer] and I, in The Cardinals, didn't ever see eye-to-eye about how it's supposed to sound. Brad played on *Cold Roses*, and the only reason he's on it is because I made him play with brushes. I played the rest of the drums you hear on *Cold Roses* songs like 'Life Is Beautiful.'

"Brad doesn't listen to the Grateful Dead; he listens to The Clash," he continues. "And what I love about that loose-sounding, groovy Dead sound or Black Flag or Sonic Youth is when the rhythm comes undone. I love that fir t Jerry solo record because so much of it is undone, and its tempo is weird. But by the end of The Cardinals, Brad and Chris [Feinstein, the bassist] had respectfully decided that they wanted to sound like a huge rhythm section, so parts got really flattened out, and i 's not what I wanted."

Adams met Yurco through his former bassist Catherine Popper. A veteran of both The Cardinals and The Nocturnals, Popper suggested that Yurco reach out to Adams during this recent, trying period. Adams describes his current guitar foil as "the fuckin' sweetest, coolest, Zen-est—just such a bro."

Yurco called Adams "out of the blue," and they had a "beautiful conversation full of musical distractions." They quickly realized they shared a love and respect for the Grateful Dead and Black Sabbath, as well as iconic alternative artists like The Smiths and The Cure. They also bonded over pinball.

"If you want to understand how he plays guitar, watch him play pins—when he solos, he's in total multi-ball mode," Yurco says. "I actually acquired my very own pinball machine as part of my process of learning Ryan's material. It is now a permanent fixtu e in the living room and, in between learning Ryan's songs, I take a break to play a couple rounds of pins to give me perspective. That's the PAX-AM way."

Before hitting the road in late 2016, Adams provided Yurco with some of his most recent studio and live recordings, which immediately revealed how his material has changed. "He wanted me to start there and become familiar with the vibe, the current live arrangements and the rhythmic feels," Yurco says. "Before we started the fir t week of rehearsals at PAX-AM, our bassist Charlie had put together lyric books for us with a master song list with lyrics to about 100-plus songs from past, present and B-side recordings. So I began learning those tunes on my off-time and haven't looked back."

> "I lost a lot of mojo at the end of The Cardinals, and then it remained lost for a long time out in LA." RYAN ADAMS

Especially in the festival circles that discovered Adams during his Cardinals years, Adams' new band seems to signal a return to his *Cold Roses* sound, at least live. "It's funny because we have so much in common but, at the same time, Benny has these really deep licks that I could never do," Adams says.

"My guitar playing is rooted in songs—this Sonic-Youth-to-Greg-Ginn style of playing. I never studied scales. Whenever I've incorporated that stuff int the *Cold Roses* thing, there's this 'what the fuck' vibe to it 'cause I shouldn't play technical music. But I've become much more of a real guitar player since The Cardinals and when we jam, [Benny is] so open and into listening but, at the same time, he's such a passive force. We act like opposite ends of the battery. We've only just started to explore what we can do. Everything that I was hinting at with the *Cold Roses* sound, Benny and I can take so much further because he can really teach me, and he loves the idea that I'm learning. I don't want this band to have any influence past 1986."

These days, when he's not on the road or in the studio, Adams expresses his paternal instincts through his three cats: Vincent, Theo and Agnes. Right now, he's worried that Theo is being really moody—"sitting in the window a lot, just looking out and just kind of staring." He'll leave the TV on for his feline friends when he's gone and says that Agnes, "a troublemaker in a great way" who likes to snuggle, will try to interact with Anderson Cooper or James Franco on the screen. Adams also mentions that he'll choose whatever station is the mellowest, and that he used to make mixtapes for Vincent and Theo.

"They grew up listening to me playing guitar and listening to mixtapes of early Dylan, the mellower Dead stuff. They don't have a Jerry or Bob problem," he says with a straight face. "*Terrapin Station* is totally, really, honestly how those kittens were raised. I'd watch their ears go around while they listened on those little iPod speakers. Theo is super down with black metal; Vincent is not interested at all in it."

Despite the rollout that comes with *Prisone*r, including a release show at the world-famous Apollo and a slew of headlining theater dates, Adams is already focused on making more music—he even calls Yerington mid-interview to tell him to come down to Electric Lady later in the day to work on some new ideas. It remains to be seen whether Adams' next album will showcase a sensitive singer-songwriter, alt-country troubadour, psychedelic worrier, Lower East Side punk torchbearer, black-metal enthusiast, unexpected Taylor Swift supporter or an entirely diffe ent side of his personality. But he seems satisfied i knowing that he has at least three fans that will follow him on his sonic journey, wherever it takes him.

"They know my voice in my music too, which is pretty cool. They know when it's me singing," Adams says of his cats. "The other night, I got the record player going and I put on this Big Country record, and Theo came and sat right in front of the speaker and just stayed for the whole side. And I was like, 'No shit. He likes Big Country!' I had no fucking idea he was into that stuff. I don't know where to go from there, but I'm going to figu e it out."

REVIEWS

Compiled by MIKE GREENHAUS

Alison Krauss

ALISON KRAUSS

Windy City CAPITOL

Alison Krauss is only 45 years old, but she's been recording since her teens and has already received 27 Grammy Awards, including one for Album of the Year for her 2007 collaboration with Robert Plant, *Raising Sand*. She's tied with Quincy Jones as the second most-awarded artist in Grammy history (behind the late classical conductor Georg Solti) and has also won more than any other living female artist or any other singer. Considering that Krauss' stock-in-trade is bluegrass music—who ever heard of such a decorated fiddler?—it's all the more remarkable. With that track record, when Krauss releases a new album, it gets attention; and, hopefully, *Windy City* will find its way to as many ears as *Raising Sand* did. For this one, Krauss, teaming with Nashville producer **Buddy Cannon**, looks back to an earlier era when country music was really country music—most of the songs here were originally recorded in the '60s-'80s by artists like Brenda Lee, Willie Nelson and Glen Campbell. Yet it's that distance of years that allows her to reshape them in her own image, to drill into the center of each one and interpret it anew, minus context. "River in the Rain" is a particular jewel: Written and recorded by Roger Miller ("King of the Road") for his Broadway musical *Big River*, it's a lush, soaring ballad, ornamented with light, unobtrusive orchestration. And no matter how many times you've heard "Gentle on My Mind," the arrangement here will make you fall in love with it all over again. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Ryan Adams

Prisoner PAX-AM/BLUE NOTE

It's hard not to feel guilty listening to **Ryan Adams**' masterful 16th LP. What kind of monster takes such pleasure from a man's blatant misery? But pain births great art, and *Prisoner* is just that. The album was borne from the singer-songwriter's high-profile divorce, and that context is inextricable from the songs, which hammer on your heart with the blunt force of a sledgehammer. Adams, voice ragged, moans about living in a "Haunted House," teetering toward a "Breakdown" and eyeing a romantic "Doomsday." Throughout, he sings with unfiltered angst–slightly slurred, clearly distraught–as if he booked a recording session and therapy session simultaneously. In one particularly bleak moment, backed by a shimmering electric-guitar progression, he seeks comfort from the phantom of his ex-wife: "I reach out for your hand, but I know it isn't there," he croons. "I pick up my phone, and I shiver and stare."

Prisoner, Adams' first album since a 2015 reimagining of Taylor Swift's *1989*, retains the classic-rock and alt-country focus of his previous work, but is embellished with thrilling sonic twists at every turn: the wailing saxophone on "Tightrope," the atmospheric wah-wah at the climax of "Broken Anyway," the choral synth breezes of "Shiver and Shake." These may be his most soul-crushing songs, but they're crafted for catharsis. "We disappear, and we fade away," Adams quivers during the set's fragile finale, as a woman's distant laughter and a phased-out guitar solo echo into oblivion. *Prisoner* is the most personal of projects, but its emotions are universal. ***Ryan Reed***

The Shins

Heartworms

AURAL APOTHECARY/COLUMBIA

The Shins' best music has always been bittersweet: lovely, floating melodies and airy arrangements tinged with a palpable, nostalgic sadness. It's no secret why the band was handpicked as the musical highlight of the "isn't life (painfully) beautiful?" romp that was *Garden State*. At the core of all those vibes is **James Mercer**, The Shins' singer, songwriter and only truly steady member. On the band's fifth studio album, the aptly titled *Heartworms*, Mercer once again pierces the sweet spot that made his band capital-I Important back in 2001.

Mercer's melodies are as deliciously odd as his best work–this time wrapped in a jangling pop-rock package that sounds simultaneously taut and about to crumble like building blocks. The warbling far-off folk of The Shins' earliest output peeks out between more electrifying tunes here: On "Dead Alive," first released back in fall 2016, Mercer is shuffling down a hazy street, gliding on acoustic strumming and barroom piano while spotting "monuments for awful events." "So, tonight," he instructs, "dance and cry." It's The Shins' mission statement in one shimmering, wriggling pop song.

Mercer self-produced all but one track on *Heartworms*, but he never tries to push these songs into an unfitting new shape. The tunes that call for distant, echoing production get it (the gorgeously airborne "So Now What," or the gentle carnival feel of "Fantasy Island"), and the more immediate songs play with a fitting punchiness (the downright rocking "Half a Million"). *Heartworms* holds its secrets close; pop this album on repeat and listen to it bloom. ***Justin Jacobs***

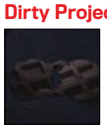
STS9

The Universe Inside 1320

Disco has been psychedelic since David Mancuso's very first Love Saves the Day parties in 1970, and jam fans have long loved to dance, so it was only a surprise that it took until the turn of the 21st century for the two to collide. Emerging from the South in the late '90s, pioneering jam-dancers **STS9**–then Sector 9–discovered a world inside the blissful space created by their high-energy and open-ended jams, sometimes landing inside a meditative stillness that felt capable of going anywhere. Evolving, as bands do, *The Universe Inside* finds them numerous iterations and ideas into the future, still preaching the good cosmic mission, but with (as they say) a new direction. With new bassist **Alana Rocklin**, *The Universe Inside*'s jams have turned from improvisational into the party-pop variety. "Get loud and turn this party up," vocalist **Betty Idol** instructs on "Get Loud," one of a squadron of female singers on the album. In places, they find a decent balance, sounding human and jammy on "New Dawn, New Day," but the soul-funk pulse of "Worry No More" seems like a bummer payoff after the infinities promised by the Alan Watts-sampling "Totem," one of several links to the band's heady heritage. Though the band's grooves are intact, especially the casting searchlights of **Hunter Brown**'s staccato guitar ("Out of This World"), most of the vocals on *The Universe Inside* transform the band's unspecified far-out tendencies into something far more earthbound and less ambitious, a stop-off between inner and outer space that looks a lot like a dance floor. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Dirty Projectors

Dirty Projectors DOMINO



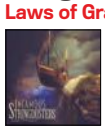
"I want to sleep with no dreams," **Dave Longstreth** croons from within a shapeshifting windstorm of electronics, acoustic guitars and strings. "I want to be dead." It's one of many bone-chilling moments on **Dirty Projectors**' seventh LP: a heartbreaking, musically manic post-mortem of his relationship with former bandmate Amber Coffman. Longstreth probed the limits of experimental rock on previous albums but, here, he explores uncharted territory: his shattered soul. *Dirty Projectors* is an often painful, voyeuristic listen, as he lays bare unfiltered heartbreak (electro-soul ballad "Keep Your Name," which samples Coffman's voice via the Projectors' "Impregnable Question"), recounts being blindsided by love at first sight (sax-scorched, psych-folk

The Infamous Stringdusters

freak-out "Up in Hudson") and becomes sucked into a jazzy "Death Spiral." But Longstreth's misery is cathartic, as he exorcises vividly personal details–seeing Coffman perform at New York's Bowery Ballroom ("Hudson"), feeling the "black hole" of a lonely October morning in bed ("Little Bubble")–amid his sprawling soundscapes. That palpable pain pushes Longstreth to new musical realms: rapping, squelching low-end, orchestral flourishes, clanging auxiliary percussion (courtesy of **Mauro Refosco**), Fender Rhodes grooves, Auto-Tune blasts. It's challenging stuff, even for Dirty Projectors. "Winner Take Nothing," with its meandering arrangement detours, takes a handful of listens to absorb in full. After bare-knuckle boxing our hearts for over a half hour, Longstreth ends the LP with a healing mantra: "It's gonna get better," he reminds himself, encouraged by a gospel Hammond organ. Battle-scarred but buzzing with creative vigor, he marches forward. ***Ryan Reed***

The Infamous Stringdusters

Laws of Gravity COMPASS



A follow-up to a pair of somewhat novelty releases–2015's *Undercover*, a set wholly made up of cover tunes, and *Ladies & Gentlemen*, which featured an array of notable female guest singers–*Laws of Gravity* finds **The Infamous Stringdusters** returning to their roots, through original material that tackles traditional themes and broader circumstances. It's a blueprint that the band has followed since their formation a dozen years ago, over the course of the eight albums they've released. Still, it does mark a change of sorts. In the wake of a divisive election year and one of the most fractious periods in American history, its tracks get to the root of the discourse, tackling subjects that question basic precepts and principles. That's evident in several song titles–"Freedom," "Gravity," "Soul Searching" and "A Hard Life Makes a Good Song" in particular–but the message is unmistakable elsewhere as well, nowhere more so than in the fervent drive and delivery of "This Ol' Building," a discussion about perseverance and purpose. Then again, that's a natural byproduct of a band whose instrumental interplay has made them the darlings of both the bluegrass crowd and the festival faithful. The centerpiece of the album is easily one of their most ambitious outings yet, a suite inspired by a historic expedition, grandly titled "1901: A Canyon Odyssey." Stirring and majestic, it reaffirms their reverence for their roots and moves them forward at the same time. That, in essence, is the precise reason why *Laws of Gravity* consistently seems to soar. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Rhiannon Giddens

Freedom Highway NONESUCH

There's an urgency to the songs on *Freedom Highway*, **Rhiannon Giddens**' blazing new solo album, that will make you want to take to the streets and march. Whether you follow that urge or not, take it as a sign that Giddens is on a journey from folk singer to folk firebrand. As a member of the Carolina Chocolate Drops, Giddens created lovely, grinning old-time music; her solo debut, *Tomorrow Is My Turn*, emboldened her gorgeous, soulful voice. Wonderfully woozy, front-porch touches–a washboard and a muted trumpet on "Hey Bébé," for example–are lighthearted nods to Giddens' earlier work, but *Freedom Highway* is on a new plane. Giddens wrote nine of the album's 12 tracks, adding in civil rights era tunes "Birmingham Sunday" and "Freedom Highway" to her smoky brew. Inspired by an 1850s "slave for sale" ad, the mesmerizing "At the Purchaser's Option" lets acoustic strings waltz together before Giddens' intensity rises. Cool and calm, she sings, "I got a body, dark and strong. I was young, but not for long. You took me to bed a little girl, left me in a woman's world. You can take my body; you can take my bones. You can take my blood, but not my soul." *Freedom Highway* was recorded in Louisiana, largely in pre-Civil War rooms; Giddens sought to connect to her painful American roots through these tracks. These are hushed, fingerpicked, achingly fiddled story songs that bring the ghosts of the past to confront the problems of the present. The results are astounding. ***Justin Jacobs***

Scott McCormick

Mike Zito

Make Blues Not War RUF

Would-be guitar heroes never have it easy. You might play like Hendrix or Clapton, but unless you can carve out your own identity (not to mention original songs worth covering), notoriety is often little more than a cruel and elusive mistress. **Mike Zito** has logged the miles and paid the dues, and while he's not quite a household name just yet, he's stirred up a considerable ruckus as a blues rocker with a butt-kicking, blue-collar style that's steeped in dashboard Americana. *Make Blues Not War* is his second studio album since his stint with Devon Allman and Cyril Neville in Royal Southern Brotherhood, and it finds him raising the stakes as a singer-songwriter, performer and bandleader, from the hard-chugging "Highway Mama" to the psychedelic, kiss-the-sky flight of "Redbird," which conjures an uncanny mix of Stevie Ray Vaughan and Robin Trower. Zito is still making his mark but, as the St. Louis native absorbs more of the barbecued blues and soul-fried sounds of his adopted home of southeastern Texas—you can hear it in the loping, Allmans-esque strains of "Road Dog" and the haunting Delta slide-guitar of the title track (with the estimable **Jason Ricci** on harmonica)—he's beginning to craft a bold, brash signature that's his alone. ***Bill Murphy***

Grandaddy

Last Place 30TH CENTURY

Last Place is **Grandaddy**'s fi st new album since their 2006 split and 2012 reformation. It not only marks a new chapter in the California rock band's career, but also effectively restarts it. Several of the disc's early singles, like memorable opener "Way We Won't" and hushed ballad "A Lost Machine," gave fans a sense of what's to come, but it's only while listening to *Last Place* as a whole that you really understand who the musicians in Grandaddy are now. The tracks veer stylistically, but always stay close to the group's indie-rock sensibility, which often pairs thoughtful lyrics with charming, sing-along melodies. "I Don't Wanna Live Here Anymore" is propulsive and hooky, resulting in a carefully built power-pop anthem with a simply stated narrative. In fact, most of the songs here adhere to the idea that simple is better. Grandaddy doesn't overcomplicate their songs or over-layer the instrumentals; instead, they craft each song with exactly what it needs. Tracks like "Evermore" and the orchestral "This Is the Part" work because every aspect comes together in harmony, proving that time away hasn't hindered Grandaddy's ability to create solid music. On the album's closer, "Songbird Son," the band initially builds a slightly more complex soundscape, piling ethereal sounds before succumbing to sparse acoustic riffs and singer **Jason Lytle**'s croon. It's a nice way to end things, even if it's emotionally heavy, because it's a reminder that these musicians still have something to say—and that they know how to say it. ***Emily Zemler***

Dungen

Häxan MEXICAN SUMMER

With their symphonic prog-rock instrumentation and psychedelic soundscapes, **Dungen** have always borrowed liberally from their '70s heroes. The Swedish quartet digs even deeper into the past on their eighth record, *Häxan*, assembling a spooky soundtrack to *The Adventures of Prince Achmed*, a 1926 animated German film that's long faded into obscurity. If any rock band is suited for that bizarre, blatantly uncommercial task, then it's Dungen, and these 14 instrumental tracks highlight all of their trademark styles—from withered jazz-rock interlude "Den Fattige Aladdin" to Mellotron-laced epic "Achmed Flyger." Like most soundtracks, *Häxan* often loses its legs without a visual counterpart, and many of these riffs and grooves feel slight as stand-alone "songs": "Trollkarlen Och Fågeldräkten," for example, offers a menacing jazz-fusion groove but buckles with numbing repetition a couple minutes in. Still, sparks of brilliance abound: "Kalifen," built on rippling Hammond organ chords, plays like a druggier version of Procol Harum's "A Whiter Shade of Pale." It's easy to imagine similar tracks, fleshed out with more dynamic arrangements, as grandiose centerpieces of a more traditional LP. Despite its limitations, *Häxan* illustrates Dungen's command of their retro vocabulary—sometimes looking back is the only way to move forward. ***Ryan Reed***

Dungen

Reed Mathis & Electric Beethoven

Beathoven THE ROYAL POTATO FAMILY

Bassist **Reed Mathis** says that his love of Ludwig van Beethoven started when he was just 3 years old, listening to Beethoven's "Symphony No. 6" on vinyl, building a little fort around himself and going to his childhood happy place. Since then, he's spent time jamming with everyone from Phil Lesh, Bill Kreutzmann and Mickey Hart to Marco Benevento and **Joe Russo**, not to mention the time he spent with the awesomely groovy Tea Leaf Green and his whopping 14-year run with Jacob Fred Jazz Odyssey. Viewed in the context of Mathis' genre-hopping chops, *Beathoven* is a return to where his love of music first began, bolstered by the talented friends he's made along the way. Repurposing Beethoven's "Symphony No. 6" and "Symphony No. 3" in their entireties, the reimaginings seamlessly take on the sonic qualities of Mathis' collaborators. "In Memory of a Great Man" practically gallops with the slinky bass of Phish's **Mike Gordon** and the killer, in-the-pocket fills of Russo's drumming. "Rebirth," meanwhile, transforms a familiar melody into a sprawling, roots epic courtesy of **Andrew** and **Brad Barr**. Mathis is calling **Electric Beethoven** "CDM," or "classical dance music," and the name isn't too far off. This is the kind of feel-good project that reminds us how capable the artists we respect can be at channeling the works of a past master. But it also proves that few but Mathis could pull off such an ambitious time-warp of a project with genuine feeling and keep it from descending into gimmickry. ***Justin Joffe***

Son Volt

Notes of Blue THIRTY TIGERS

Jay Farrar insists the blues are the inspiration behind **Son Volt**'s eighth studio album, but the infl ence doesn't really grab you until you get to "Static"—a jagged, one-riff workout that fi ds Farrar and his bandmates raging against the dying of the light: "We all go down before we're ready/ I feel like my time, my time ain't long." Here, and in the foot-stomping "Cherokee St.," you can detect the plaintive voice of bluegrass king Ralph Stanley in the way Farrar turns a phrase, and that alone imbues *Notes of Blue* with a vaguely unsettling mystique. It's no secret that good rock-and-roll draws a heap of passion and mythos from the blues; for Farrar, the allure comes from exploring the form's many permutations, whether it's in the quiet contemplation of "The Storm" (an acoustic take that's reminiscent of the Stones' "Factory Girl," only darker) or the smoky Link Wray-meets-the-devil groove of "Threads and Steel." Themes of apocalyptic dread ("Lost Souls") and despair ("Midnight") keep the narrative close to the black seam, but it's not all doom and gloom; "Promise the World," the album's country-tinged opening cut, assures a redemptive "light after darkness"—a modest and even clichéd sentiment, but in these uncertain times, we can use it. ***Bill Murphy***

Dead Man Winter

Furnace THIRTY TIGERS/ GNDWIRE

In his liner notes, **Dead Man Winter**'s leader and chief provocateur **Dave Simonett** confesses that his new album nearly didn't come to fruition, as it was the victim, he says, of a "cold year of madness and confusion," resulting from his bitter divorce and ensuing family turmoil. Even so, Dead Man Winter's superb new effort boasts a catchy, coherent set of songs, and save for the album opener, the weary "This House Is on Fire," and the telling "You Are Out of Control," it's remarkably rousing for music borne from such trying circumstances. Instantly accessible, its mix of softer tones and assertive anthems bears the stamp of absolute authority, and its sound fi ds fruition in both the tender touch of "I Remember This Place Being Bigger" and the irrepressible refrains of tracks like "Am I Breaking Down." Granted, there's more than a hint of trepidation in the aforementioned titles and the tenuous tones of "Cardinal" and "Weight of the World," but Simonett manages to transpose his difficult circumstances into a delivery that asserts clarity and confidence. *Furnace* is Simonett's sophomore album under the moniker that he adapted after putting his full-time outfit, Trampled By Turtles, temporarily on hold. Consequently, it doesn't really sound like that other ensemble, save for the quality of the songwriting. Flush with poignancy and reflection, it places its emphasis on songs with a sensuous yet sensitive appeal. *Furnace* may not always burn bright, given its echoes of remorse and despair, but it does resonate regardless. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Erik Deutsch

Creatures SELF-RELEASED

Pianist **Erik Deutsch** has proven himself in both the jazz and pop realms, thanks to his time in the groove collective Fat Mama, his work with Norah Jones, Citizen Cope, Shooter Jennings, Teddy Thompson and four albums under his own name. Yet *Creatures* is his first true "solo" release, a sweeping, supple and skillful set that brings clear comparisons to piano works by George Winston, Keith Jarrett, and, to a lesser extent, McCoy Tyner. Still, Deutsch's compositions employ a more melodic tone, from the fluid fills of "Firefly" and "Incandescence" to the more emphatic designs of "Fishmonger" and "Black Flies." Deutsch can be plucky at times, but his nimble approach makes each of these offerings graceful and engaging, an autumnal approach that doesn't leave any distance between the music and the listener. Even in its more sobering moments—"Prayer for Zimewanga" being the best example—there's still a feeling of guarded jubilation, a free-flowing pastiche that reflects a lack of constraint. While the melodies tend to make a more emphatic impression when Deutsch doesn't delve into more fragmented meandering, as evidenced in "Doctor's Demon," there's not a track on the entire album that isn't instantly engaging. That defies the notion of most instrumental outings,

which often only add to the ambience. Fortunately, these *Creatures* are far more persuasive. ***Lee Zimmerman***

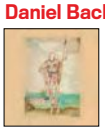
Delicate Steve

This Is Steve ANTI-

Steve Marion returns with his slide-guitar-fueled **Delicate Steve** project, releasing his third album under the moniker and first for his new label, ANTI-. *This Is Steve* picks up where 2012's *Positive Force* left off, delivering a quick-hitting collection of various soundscapes, topped off with Marion's typically lyrical, earworm guitar lines. A self-proclaimed studio rat whose output thus far has been informed mostly by what cool sounds he can create behind the boards on his own, Marion says that this record was the first one he's made with an eye toward his live show, and the results can be heard in the rock-and-roll guitar tones (that actually sound like guitar, for a change) of "Cartoon Rock." Another single, "Winners," has an Elton John-inspired opening melody and feels like a long, triumphant drive on the open road, and the chunky, reggae-infused "Nightlife" is appropriately followed up by the hangover-cure swoon of "Tomorrow." The title track that closes out the record is deceptively subdued for an eponymous introduction to such a high-energy artist, but most of *This Is Steve* provides old and new fans all they need to know about Marion's free-flowing, expansive and ultimately satisfying musical ethos. ***Matt Inman***

Daniel Bachman

Daniel Bachman THREE LOBED



Guitarist **Daniel Bachman** reins in the eclecticism on his self-titled album, his eighth in the past five years. Entering after a shruti box drone prelude on the album-opening "Brightleaf Blues (I)," his guitar playing like a passing morning mist, Bachman goes mostly unaccompanied on these seven tracks. Still a young voice in the massive wave of new solo acoustic players emerging over the past decade, he finds a range of expressions, including the hard percussive blues of "Wine and Peanuts," the summery slide-guitar sunshine of "Watermelon Slices on a Blue Bordered Plate," and the whispered stillness of "A Dog Named Pepper." Bachman finds movement on the latter, working his way up-neck before falling back to near silence, and eventually yielding to a field recording. The album's most exciting moments are when Bachman does it all, traveling dramatically within his compositions, like the raga crest and resolution of "The Flower Tree." On "Brightleaf Blues (II)," Bachman stays with the shruti box–the slide guitar wedging into the corners of the sound–with Bachman touching on spaces found more often in Carnatic Indian guitar than the new, new American Primitivists. For seven minutes, Bachman stays with it, eventually letting the drone move on by itself for another five, and posits a new way that the musician promises that–even within the century-old confines of a six-string guitar–the possibilities remain as open as an unexplored river system. ***Jesse Jarnow***

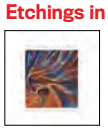
Pissed Jeans

Why Love Now SUB POP

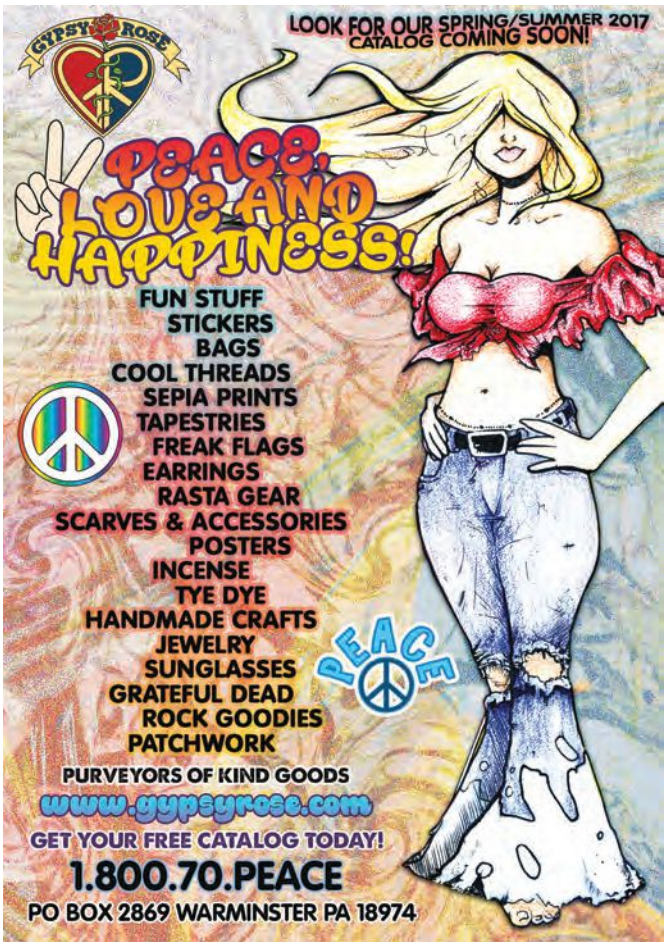
On their fi th album, punk rockers **Pissed Jeans** are interested in asking questions. The 12 sludging tracks on *Why Love Now* center on the status quo and how we live our lives now. There are comments about gender (the pointed "It's Your Knees" questions how men decide on a woman's attractiveness) and masculinity, as well as the instinct to spend your days in an office and on the internet. Like on their prior releases, the songs here feel fresh and unexpected. There's an inherent energy to the tracks, which comes from both the aggression of the instruments and frontman **Matt Korvette**'s growling vocals, as well as from the band's own passion. "Ignorecam" is a surging metal-tinged number that allows Korvette the chance to snarl and howl about webcam culture, while "Activia" is a slow-paced stoner-rock tune that takes more time to unleash itself. The musicians don't necessarily have answers to the questions they pose or solutions to the issues they raise. The point is that they aren't accepting their reality–and neither should the listener. The songs here can be for entertainment and head-banging, but they can also be tools for exploration. It's also important, especially now, that male rock bands are willing to wonder whether they can treat women better and how they can do it. ***Emily Zemler***

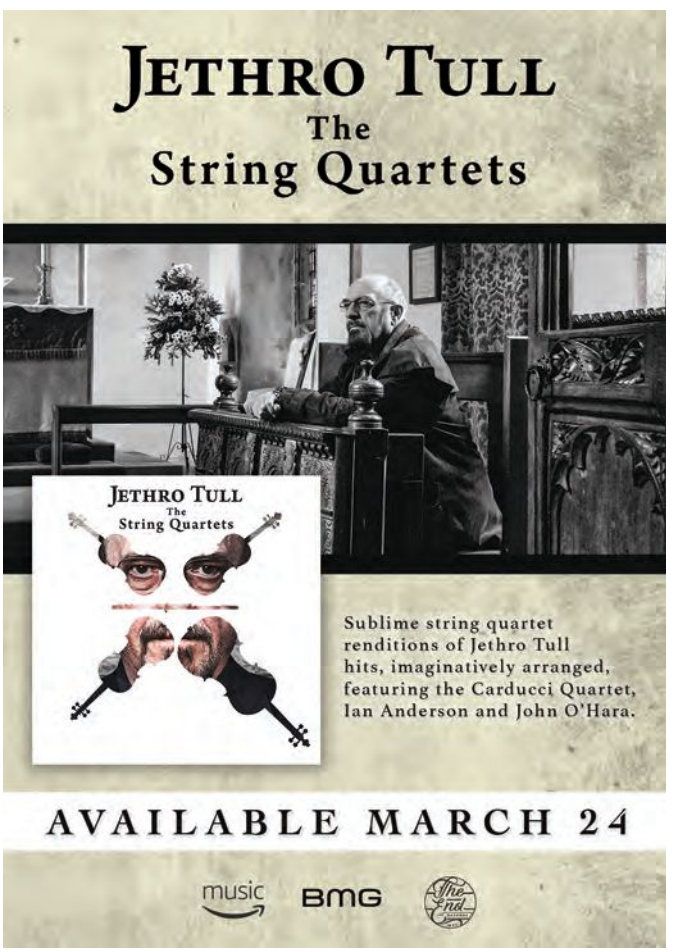
Natalie Cressman & Mike Bono

Etchings in Amber SELF-RELEASED



Natalie Cressman first joined forces with guitarist **Mike Bono** two years ago, but both artists have been traveling the world with other projects since then. Their first release as a duo, *Etchings in Amber*, realizes Cressman and Bono's skill at crafting light, jazzy ballads, best consumed late at night somewhere with a drink minimum. It's a culmination of Cressman's jazz upbringing and her solo career, made up of refreshing, compositional turns owing equal inspiration to the jam vibes she has picked up as a standing member of Trey Anastasio Band and as a collaborator with Lettuce. Bono's CV is equally impressive, including time spent with Erykah Badu and Aloe Blacc. He's honed a strumming style that's noodle-y but precise, with chill and meditative vibes that fortify Cressman's knack for untying a knotty phrase. Though she forgoes her signature trombone on these nine tracks, *Etchings in Amber* brings the listener ever closer to Cressman's power as a vocalist, conjuring shades of Joni Mitchell in crystallizing solitude, with a level of introspection far beyond her 24 years. Consider the early album highlight "Wind of Whims," where she casually sings, "Gambling has its costs." The ability to write a line so simple yet profound is a distinction we bestow on Neil Young and Robert Hunter, but Cressman's got it, too. It's fitting that she uses such gifts with careful sparsity, on a record without distractions to get in the way of the songs, both beautiful in their directness and unexpectedly deep. ***Justin Joffe***





The String Cheese Incident

SCI Sound Lab, Volume I SCI FIDELITY

Two decades in, **The String Cheese Incident** are getting creative, hoping to satiate both their ever-evolving artistry and hungry fans. In June, the jamband announced SCI Sound Lab, a hub for releasing new tunes quickly from the sextet's Colorado studio. Envisioned as an alternative to the "sometimes arduous process of releasing an album," SCI made five tracks available for download for *Volume I*—all produced by **Jerry Harrison** and already in live rotation. (They also promise to dip into remixes of old songs, remastered live material and even demos.) The songs vary from **Billy Nershi**'s leisurely "Down a River" to **Michael Kang**'s power anthem "Believe." The standouts are **Keith Moseley**'s feel-good pop numbers, "Get Tight" and "Sweet Spot," featuring soul vocalist **Rhonda Thomas**. Although the songs are solid, more casual listeners may be skeptical of tunes that lack the energy of a live show and the thorough vetting of an album release. For a group that has always operated between genres and at an inspirational whim, the timeliness invites fans to follow the band's evolution. *Kiran Herbert*

Stick Men

Prog Noir IAPETUS

Firing on all cylinders, **Stick Men**'s bruising prog-rock conjures an alternate universe where Robert Fripp isn't allergic to the recording studio. At their worst, they remind you that Fripps aren't a dime a dozen. The King Crimson reference is unavoidable: Chapman Stick master **Tony Levin** and drummer **Pat Mastelotto** are longtime members of the legendary prog act, and Touch guitar virtuoso **Markus Reuter**—a former Fripp student—favors the sort of weaving, dissonant melodies that his idol has flaunted since the '80s. On their fifth full-length, the trio refines its effortless, dynamic interplay on the largely instrumental second side: With their stuttering drum grooves, purring low-end and electronic noise explosions, face-melters like "Schattenhaft" and "Embracing the Sun" tap into the metallic eeriness of modern Crim LPs, like 2003's *The Power to Believe*. But Stick Men can also surprise you—like on the ornate "Rose in the Sand/Requiem," which evolves from a symphonic stick arrangement to post-rock atmospherics. They should lean harder on these core strengths. The handful of vocal tracks, like the droning "The Tempest," lack the band's trademark rhythmic and harmonic depth. "Connected now, joined at the hip," Levin sings. When that description fits, Stick Men's fire is inextinguishable. *Ryan Reed*

Ear Crystals BY RICHARD GEHR

The search for other-world audio gems

Power tripping. West Coast psychedelic-soul collective **Mushroom** provides porn-funking musical accompaniment to Black Panther leader Eldridge Cleaver's 1971 denunciation of acid guru Timothy Leary on the 18-minute title track of *Psychedelic Soul on Wax* (Little Mafia). A musical coda to Mushroom drummer **Pat Thomas**' book *Listen, Whitey!: The Sounds of Black Power 1965-1975*, this potent head trip of a vinyl/digital album also includes a happy-making version of "The Flesh Failures/Let the Sun Shine In," from the musical *Hair*, and a pair of dark, sexy improvisations.

Elf on the way. **Club d'Elf**'s double-disc *Live at Club Helsinki* (Face Pelt) captures **Mike Rivard**'s remarkable Morocco-meets-space-funk fusion ensemble on a particularly spicy night in 2012. Rivard (who plays both bass and the three-stringed, camel-skin-covered sintir) blends Gnawa trance music and Chaab street music with electric Miles Davis, Pink Floyd space-rock and good old American jamming. The band—**John Medeski** (keyboards), **Brahim Fribgane** (oud), **Duke Levine** (guitar), **MiSTer RouRKe** (DJ) and **Dean Johnston** (drums)—drifts from zone to zone as though on an alien exploratory mission, punctuated intermittently with chopped-up commentary by psychedelic elf wrangler **Terrence McKenna**.

Valley guy. There's something delightfully irrepressible about vallenato, a chugging engine of percussion and accordion that originated among the farmers living near the Caribbean coast in northeastern Colombia. And no one embodied the vallenato sound more than singing accordionist **Andrés Landero** (1931-2000), some of whose best work can be heard on *Yo Amencí* (Vampisoul). Landero sings stridently about farming traditions ("Mi Machete"), tragedy ("La Muerte de Eduardo Lora") and the joys of being a traveling musician ("Cumbia en la India"), adding exclamatory accordion fills over the synchronized polyrhythms of his accompanists: a pair of caja drummers, a guacharaca scraper and a bassist. (Landero's legacy lives on in Los Angeles vallenato kings Very Be Careful.)

Eye in the sky. Nashville's **James Wallace** rebrands himself as **Skyway Man** with *Seen Comin' From a Mighty Eye* (Yewknee). Wallace, a terrific songwriter, harnesses blue-eyed gospel and soul for this science-fiction-infused collection that recalls Paul Simon at his most wide-eyed American. Recorded at Spacebomb Studios with some of its regulars, *Mighty Eye* has a big, sophisticated sound similar to studio proprietor **Matthew E. White**'s, but rather more anxious and angular around its edges. Wallace's lyrics ruminate on the alien and apocalyptic in everyday life. There's an earthquake out West, spaceships hovering in the heavens and muscular horn charts to help you through the end times.

Whisper words of weirdness. Lo-fi egend **R. Stevie Moore** emerges from semi-retirement and joins **Jason Falkner** (The Three O'Clock, Jellyfi h) for *Make It Be* (Bar/None), a sassy romp through prog-pop, garage rock and Moore's stream of consciousness. Weirdness is its own craft, and Moore, 65, excels at it by following his fan-man bliss—in the Talking Heads Afro-rock of "That's Fine, What Time?," the winsome Beach Boys meta-pop of "Play Myself Some Music" and the Eno-esque green-world drift of "Passed Away Today"—and in interstitial flurries of poetry. Retro highlight: Huey Smith & The Clowns' "Don't You Just Know It."

Ultimate Painting

Dusk TROUBLE IN MIND

Named for a giant circular artwork created in 1966 by the residents of Drop City, the dome-studded Colorado commune, the British duo **Ultimate Painting** bring a gentle focus to an array of psychedelic folk-rock moves. Like a British version of Woods, the dependable American indie-psych mainstays, Ultimate Painting seem to simply find ways to familiar melodies—hip and evocative without being calculated or derivative. On *Dusk*, the duo's third album, the band stays within the lines. Though rich, fuzzy color palettes vibrate behind "Silhouetted Shimmering" and Mellotron-like countermelodies point to new directions ("I'm Set Free"), the band never quite liberates itself and, instead, delivers soft, miniature anthems ("Lead the Way") and cool glides over warm-toned landscapes ("Monday Morning, Somewhere Central"). Though songwriters **Jack Cooper** and **James Hoare** never quite get to the vivid colors of the Ultimate Painting itself, *Dusk* seems to linger in one of the work's lush blue regions, with songs like "Skippool Creek" pulling out choruses that channel moody and jazzified longhairs like David Crosby. *Dusk* is music to carry a listener through an empty town at night, whispering of the mysteries or perhaps just floating over the landscape, homeward through the haze, by way of colors and scenes half-remembered and fondly recovered. *Jesse Jarnow*

New Orleans Suspects

Kaleidoscoped LOUISIANA RED HOT

This supergroup started life as a pick-up band at the Maple Leaf, one of the oldest live music venues in New Orleans. Led by drummer **"Mean" Willie Green**, the band's ranks include saxophonist **Jeff Watkins** (James Brown), guitarist **Jake Eckert** (Dirty Dozen Brass Band, Dr. John) and piano/organist **CR Gruver** (Leo Nocentelli). After two years honing their sound, they left the Maple Leaf and started touring. *Kaleidoscoped* is the prolific band's fourth album and their second of all original material—another exploration of the myriad sounds of the city that gave birth to jazz and R&B. **"Big Chief" Juan Pardo** and **"Big Ike" Kinchen** from the Golden Comanche contribute vocals to "Round Up Dem Suspects," a Mardi Gras Indian romp featuring some mellow sax work by Watkins. Gruver opens "Cocaine Jane" with a calliope-like keyboard hook. A humorous lyric that details Jane's excesses gives over to Eckert's psychedelic guitar work and a stomping coda propelled by sharp, crackling sax fills from Watkins. Green's frenetic, syncopated backbeat drives "You Got the Fire," a blend of Cajun swing, crunchy funk and gritty R&B. The track sizzles with a great exchange of solos between Watkins on yakety sax and Gruver on his whistling Hammond B3, broken up by Green's dynamic use of unexpected stops and starts. Scanlan's bass, Green's kick drum and Gruver's sprightly piano introduce "Neighborhood Strut," a second-line celebration that name-checks some of the city's most lively street corners. *J. Poet*

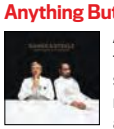
Bitchin Bajas & Bonnie 'Prince' Billy

Epic Jammers and Fortunate Little Ditties DRAG CITY

Will "Bonnie 'Prince' Billy" Oldham is no a stranger to collaboration. Over the last couple of decades, he's joined up with post-rock outfit Boxhead Ensemble, Tortoise, the Amalgamated Sons of Rest (with the late Jason Molina of Magnolia Electric Co. and Songs: Ohia) and with Dawn McCarthy on his collection of Everly Brothers record-ings, as well as many more configura-tions. But rarely have his collaborative outings felt as free or unencumbered as *Epic Jammers and Fortunate Little Ditties*, which pairs Oldham with Chicago new age/drone/minimalist group **Bitchin Bajas** (**Cooper Crain**, **Dan Quinlivan** and **Rob Frye**). Recorded mostly live in Kentucky and almost entirely improvised, the album fi ds Oldham reading from Chinese fortune-cookie adages, freely loping and weaving in and out of the Bajas' airy, spiritual soup. "Nature makes us for ourselves to be," Oldham sings over a groove of flute, synth bass and a zither, which recalls the meditative lull of Laraaji. The mood stays gentle, and even if titles like "You Will Soon Discover How Truly Fortunate You Really Are" or "De-spair Is Criminal" might evoke the spooky themes that often appear on Oldham's solo records, here, the assembled mass is dedicated solely to healing, assuring waves. *Jason Woodbury*

Banks & Steelz

Anything But Words WARNER BROS.



Although **RZA** and Interpol frontman **Paul Banks** may seem like two disparate musical forces, their pairing as **Banks & Steelz**, a collaboration that has been in the works for several years, could not make more sense. The duo's debut album, *Anything but Words*, paces itself between Banks' darkly lit indie-rock sensibility and RZA's spit-fire rhymes, which take on a timely political and social tone. The record, produced by **John Hill** and **Kid Harpoon**, opens with single "Giant," a deeply compelling track that sounds like a hip-hop remix of Interpol, and the album also features guest appearances by Wu-Tang Clan members **Ghostface Killah**, **Method Man** and **Masta Killa** (as well as **Florence Welch** and **Kool Keith**). The music is instinctually cool, building moody atmospheres that are punctuated with strange electronic notes. The title track slides between Banks' familiar drawling croon and RZA's brash, fast-talking delivery, with each musician's

own style giving way to the other's. It's unexpectedly seamless, especially on boisterous standout "Love and War," on which Banks asks: "If all is fair in love and war/ What are you keeping score for?" Collaborations, particularly across genres, can be hit or miss. This is a bullseye.
Emily Zemler

Ryley Walker
Golden Sings That Have Been Sung
DEAD OCEANS

Since 2014, Chicago singer-songwriter **Ryley Walker** has released good-to-great documents blending English folk-rock and American Primitive guitar. It earned him big-name fans—namely Robert Plant and Pentangle double-bassist Danny Thompson, with whom he has collaborated. But until now, with the release of his latest full-length, *Golden Sings That Have Been Sung*, there's always been a disconnect between the stoic and flowery sound of his albums and his live sets—given to detours into free jazz, flowery psychedelia and hilariously profane stoned-dude asides. Starting with the Jim O'Rourke indebted "The Halfwit in Me," Walker and his band open up and bloom in thrilling ways, linking progressive Chicago jazz and knotty, layered folk to mantric, cosmic, spiritual jazz. It's often a hilarious album, with Walker bemoaning his "Christian education" and, on the album standout "The Roundabout," smirking about his bad credit, the price of cigarettes and lottery tickets. Working with producer and former Wilco member **LeRoy Bach**, Walker and his band reflect the feeling of his incredible live shows, crafting a sound that synthesizes the cosmic voices of Alice Coltrane with the free-folk of Tim Buckley and John Martyn.
Jason Woodbury

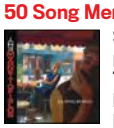
John Prine
For Better, or Worse
OH BOY/THIRTY TIGERS

John Prine and **Iris DeMent**'s "In Spite of Ourselves" is among the best duets of all time, a playful exchange between a couple of push-and-pull lovers. Prine's latest, 15-track album, *For Better, or Worse*, capitalizes on that winning combination with 14 duets, two of which—both made famous by Loretta Lynn and Ernest Tubb ("Who's Gonna Take the Garbage Out" and "Mr. & Mrs. Used to Be")—feature DeMent. The rest of the album merges classic country songs with some of modern country's most prominent vocalists, including **Lee Ann Womack** (Jessi Colter's "Storms Never Last"), **Kathy Mattea** ("Dreaming My Dreams With You," made famous by Waylon Jennings) and **Miranda Lambert** (Hank Williams' "Cold, Cold Heart"). Even newcomer **Kacey Musgraves** is there, lending her sweet, Texan charm to "Mental Cruelty," a Buck Owens and Rose Maddox staple. But mixing genres may just yield the best results: **Susan Tedeschi**'s soulful rendition of "Color of the Blues" transforms the George Jones classic completely. Other guests include **Alison Krauss**, **Amanda Shires**, **Holly Williams**, **Morgane Stapleton** and even Prine's wife, **Fiona**. On an album devoted to relationships, however, it seems appropriate that the last track, Hank Williams' "Just Waitin'," is Prine alone, sitting tight for his soulmate. *Kiran Herbert*

The Wood Brothers
Live at the Barn
HONEY JAR/THIRTY TIGERS

It's only natural that **The Wood Brothers** would find live environs such natural habitats, well-suited to their amalgam of blues, funk and rootsy revival. Given the fact that they're frequently deputized to help out on other people's recordings, it's always a revelation to find the core trio—brothers **Chris** and **Oliver Wood** and multi-instrumentalist **Jano Rix**—in live performance, where the essence of their archival sound can be captured in full bloom. Recorded at Levon Helm's barn studio in Woodstock, N.Y., this latest offering provides the ideal opportunity for the trio to serve up an appropriately rustic brew that reflects their timeless template, especially in a setting where they naturally belong. Indeed, the surroundings loom large in the proceedings, with the willowy "Postcards From Hell" dedicated to Levon himself and a sprightly cover of "Ophelia," served up in homage to The Band. Nevertheless, the tempos vary considerably—from the well-fueled funk of "Tried and Tempted" and "I Got Loaded" to the tangled backwoods blues of "Trouble in Mind," an ideal showcase for Oliver's fluid fretwork. Likewise, when the band is on a tear, as evidenced in the unhinged drive and delivery of "Honey Jar," they're all but irrepressible, and their cohesive bond is consistently clear. Though technically accomplished musicians, The Wood Brothers consistently find inspiration by going back to the basics. With *Live at the Barn*, they not only return to their roots, but effectively serve them up with style.
Lee Zimmerman

The Magnetic Fields
50 Song Memoir NONESUCH



Stephin Merritt, the primary songwriter for **The Magnetic Fields**, has decided to celebrate his 50th birthday with an ambitious musical endeavor. On *50 Song Memoir*, the musician unveils 50 tracks, one for each year of his life, to help

1 EDITOR'S PICK: Greensky Bluegrass

"Living Over"
From the album *Shouted, Written Down & Quoted*
Silver Arrow Records
Big Blue Zoo

For more than 16 years, Greensky Bluegrass has created its own version of bluegrass music, mixing the acoustic stomp of a string band with the rule-breaking spirit of rock-and-roll. They redefine that sound once again with their sixth album, Shouted, Written Down & Quoted.

www.greenskybluegrass.com

2 The Werks

"Magic"
From the album *Magic*
Self-released

On their forthcoming LP Magic, jamband favorites, The Werks, transcend their roots while never losing their identity. Poignant songwriting and engaging melody come together on a record that showcases their maturation as a multidimensional group of uniquely creative musicians.

www.thewerks.bandcamp.com

3 Papadosio

"Vactrollio"
From the album *Pattern Integrities*
Self-released

From dining in deep space to snacking on your front porch, Papadosio is as dynamic as they are intricate. Creating music that is strangely familiar and speaks the language of all humanity, they call on all walks to celebrate the one constant in an ever-changing world: music.

www.papadosio.com

4 Mammal Dap

"Lake of Shining Waters"
From the album *Deep Field*
Self-released

Mammal Dap is captivating psych-fusion from Northampton, Mass., comprised of Killian Karlsson, Zack Cross, Reed Sutherland and Colin Jalbert. After releasing their single "I Want 2 Be Ur Friend" with Relix, they toured the Northeast to bring their unique instrumental music to mind-blown audiences. Check out their new EP "Deep Field" & visit their website for Spring 2017 tour dates!

www.mammaldap.com

5 Karma Darwin

"Little Dirigible"
From the album *Karma Darwin*
Self-released

Karma Darwin entered the New York scene in 2013, with legendary influences like The Beatles and Pink Floyd shining through their debut album. Their 18-song epic is boosted only by their dynamic live performances filled with organic guitar solos, harmonies reminiscent of '60s rock-n-roll and undeniable chemistry.

www.karmadarwin.com

6 Rugby Road

"Back to You"
From the EP *III*
WYD? Records

Rugby Road, the Philadelphia-based trio, returns with the release their new EP, III. Their unique sound has garnered a cult-like following in Philly, and has allowed them to share the stage with a diverse range of artists, including The Allman Brothers Band, Maceo Parker, Rusted Root, Bill Kreutzmann, and Moe. Their late-night set with members of Phish in Philly has become the stuff of legend.

www.rugbyroadband.com

7 Atlas Road Crew

"My Own Way"
Single
Self-released

Atlas Road Crew is ready to let their fans in on what they've been cooking. "My Own Way," the band's new single and music video, is just a taste of what is on the horizon for Atlas Road Crew this year. The tune shows off a fresh, contemporary rock sound!

www.atlasroadcrew.com

8 Tweed Funk

"Love Ain't Easy"
From the album *Come Together*
Tweed Tone Records

Formed in 2010, Tweed Funk has been an integral part of the "soul-revival" movement with their own style of Memphis, Tenn.-flavored soul, roots and blues. This six-piece soul-blues outfit is fronted by Joseph "Smokey" Holman, who recorded under Curtis Mayfield in the early '70s.

www.tweedfunk.com

9 The Mushroom Cloud

"Telescopes"
From the album *Air Raid*
Self-released

The Mushroom Cloud is an explosive funk-fusion band from New Haven, Conn. Their organic and original sound is constantly evolving, taking listeners on vibrant journeys in their heads and on the dance floor. Keep an eye out for their second album, which will be released this May!

www.themushroomcloudmusic.com

10 Cosmosis Jones

"Gravity"
From *Live at Skinny Pancake Studios 1/21/17*
Self-released

Burlington, Vt.'s own Cosmosis Jones unifies the blissful nature of jam music with dark, pulsating electronica. The ensemble has evolved from raging all-improv basement sets to hosting a Nectar's residency known as Cosmic Thursdays. What has served to set Cosmosis apart from the endless onslaught of new jambands is their dedication to fluid and deeply intuitive improvisation.

www.facebook.com/cosmosisjonesband

11 Chris Boone

"Your Life"
From the album *Capture My Apathy*
Green Pear Publishing

Chris Boone brings to songwriting a keen influence from legends like Cohen and Dylan, speaking his own personal truths with a "love it or leave it" and "pass me a bottle of wine as you go" philosophy.

www.chrisboonemusic.com

12 See Water

"Hit the Moon"
From the album *Hit the Moon*
Coast Records

See Water is the love child of reggae and punk rock. This up-and-coming band from Charleston, S.C. will take your ears on a roller-coaster ride through laid-back jams and hard-hitting rock riffs. Their debut album Hit the Moon is available now on iTunes and Spotify.

www.seewatermusic.com

13 Brothers and Sisters

"Hometown"
From the album *From Earth*
Self-released

Brothers & Sisters is led by siblings Conor and Hannah McCarthy. Raised on the sounds of the '60s, they combine classic influence with cunning new ideas, creating a sound that's fresh while reminiscent of the past. Brendan Bird's powerful beats, Bubba McShane's thunderous low-end and CJ Nave's eccentric keys round out the band.

www.brothersandsistersmusic.com

14 EDITOR'S PICK: Robert Randolph & the Family Band

"Got Soul"
From the album *Got Soul*
Sony Music Masterworks

Included in Rolling Stone's "100 Greatest Guitarists" list, Robert Randolph is a renowned pedal steel guitarist, vocalist and songwriter credited with taking sacred steel music from the church into the mainstream, fusing elements of rock, funk, soul and jazz. On Got Soul, Robert Randolph & the Family Band walk that line deftly, displaying their virtuosity in a dozen smartly crafted tunes.

www.sonymusicmasterworks.com

15 JamOFF! Winner: Myakka Skunk Apes

"Perhaps That's Best"
From the album *Possible Sighting*
Self-released

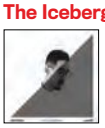
Crawling out of central Florida's swampland and rising like a phoenix from the ashes, Myakka Skunk Apes mix Southern rock tradition with a jamband sensibility to create a sound that is uniquely their own. Upbeat and danceable, these songs are strong in musicianship and content. The Edwards brothers and their compatriots will get your toes tapping and yer face a smilin'.

www.reverbnation.com/chrisedwards4.com

explain who he is and where he's been. All of the stylistically varied numbers are personal and truthful, some asking questions and some asserting lessons learned. On "I Think I'll Make Another World," the collection's sixth track, Merritt reveals his early obsession with imagination and art, explaining his ongoing inner urge to create. The later tracks, divided between five parts, pursue a similar sentiment throughout. Merritt has always been a deeply innovative musician, one who doesn't care about pretense or expectation. (He notoriously refuses applause at live concerts.) Some of these songs are strange, but they reflect his unique sensibility. "The Day I Finally…" is like a monologued bedroom recording, with only echoing vocals and a few dissonant instrumental notes. Largely, though, the songs here are the emotionally open numbers Merritt is known for. His heartbreak–and less frequent happiness–is laid bare, particularly on standout piano ballad "I'm Sad!" It's a track that strips away poetic vagueness and admits that sometimes, during all our years, we're just legitimately unhappy. This is an ambitious project, but it's also a deeply affective one. It makes you wish you were musically talented enough to do the same on your own 50th birthday. ***Emily Zemler***

Oddisee

The Iceberg MELLO MUSIC GROUP

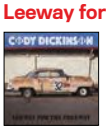


With his round-framed glasses and ever-inquisitive face, D.C.-area's **Oddisee** looks more like a beat poet than a rapper. But a listen through any of his mixtapes reveals that he's both. Born **Amir Mohamed el Khalifa** to an African-American mother and a Sudanese father, Oddisee has long been tackling the difficult, nuanced experience of being a Muslim immigrant in a white America. And his latest, *The Iceberg*, is his sharpest collection to date.

Start with the production. The *Iceberg*'s beats are jazz-flecked, symphonic grooves of undulating keyboards, slap bass and cymbal-heavy percussion. Paired with intensely kinetic rhymes, *The Iceberg* sounds like the younger, hipper foil to A Tribe Called Quest's recent *We Got It From Here…* On the creeping "Hold It Back," Oddisee looks at his family and sees injustice: "I make more than my sister 'cause I was born as a mister. But I ain't never been to college and she graduated honors, but the bosses think I'm a better fit." And on the glowing first single, "Things," Oddisee sums up the paradox of being an observer and an artist: "I'm holding on to pressure like it's all mine. That ain't sweat; it's just the way I keep the floor shined." It's a struggle, but it certainly shines. ***Justin Jacobs***

Cody Dickinson

Leeway for the Freeway DIAMOND D



A full 20 years after he co-formed North Mississippi Allstars with his brother **Luther**, **Cody Dickinson**, the band's drummer, delivers his first proper solo album. It won't surprise any fans that, like the NMAS and Cody Dickinson's Hill Country Revue, Leeway for the Freeway is 100 percent devoid of pretense and glitz. If your task was to demonstrate genuine contemporary American roots music at its slammin'-est–music that casts a direct line back to real-deal Delta blues and hard honky-tonk and stirring soul and rock-and-roll, when it really rocked and rolled–then this recording, produced by Cody's mom **Mary Lindsay Dickinson** (wife of the late producer/musician Jim Dickinson), could serve as your Exhibit A. The title track alone would satisfy your search: a smooth, adventurous arrangement somewhere between classic Allmans (**Duane Betts**, son of Dickey, supplies the sublime guitar) and *What's Going On*-era Marvin Gaye, it's a jam that does not require any falling-in-love time: One play and you'll want to hear it again the second it's finished. Ry Cooder's "Boomers Story," featuring bro Luther, perfectly juxtaposes grit and smooth, and **Robert Randolph**'s steel elevates "Wing and a Prayer" to something approaching angelic. And "Johnny B. Goode?" Not since Johnny Winter has anyone ripped into that one the way Dickinson–who plays nearly everything on the record himself–does here. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Brian Eno

Brian Eno

Reflectio WARP

As he gets older, **Brian Eno** is discovering that all roads lead back to his 1975 ambient milestone *Discreet Music*, and with good reason: Eno conceived the piece in a hospital bed while recovering from a car accident, so, in a sense, it's forever linked to a quiet, unhurried pondering of his own mortality. This practice of composing music as a response to the fragile gift of life–and by association, to the gently swirling eddies of thought and memory, which contemplation of that gift inspires–has become an intuitive exercise for Eno, to the point that *Reflection*, his latest in a literally accidental and long-running series of ambient sound recordings, comes across as a pure distillation of "generative music." The term has multiple layers of meaning, but at its simplest, it connotes music that unfolds differently with each new playback. Synth-based and spare, at a continuous 54 minutes in length, *Reflection* can blend into the aural background just as easily as it rewards close and focused listening. And, if the subtly shifting sonic environments somehow aren't enough, then Eno has released a deluxe version in the form of an app, making the possibilities truly endless. ***Bill Murphy***

Julian Lage & Chris Eldridge

Mount Royal FREE DIRT

A meeting of both minds and music, *Mount Royal* provides the second collaboration between guitar wizards **Julian Lage** and **Chris "Critter" Eldridge**, the latter moonlighting from his gig with Punch Brothers. With Punch Brothers bandmate **Gabe Witcher** assuming the role of producer, *Mount Royal* is markedly more subdued than its title might imply, but it's commanding and compelling all the same. Mostly made up of enticing instrumentals, it offers occasional vocals that provide additional interest and a wistful respite in the form of idyllic ambience. A cover of Eddie Vedder's "Sleeping by Myself," newly attuned with folk finesse, will likely draw the most listens but, in truth, it's the mellow musings and an easy, breezy feel that make *Mount Royal* so easy on the ears. Granted, it's unobtrusive in tone, but the chemistry between the two and their shared sense of subtlety can't help but impart a lingering impression. Songs such as "Life in the Mississippi Valley," "Everything Must Go" and "Lion's Share" reaffirm those delicate designs, but also make for a sound worth listening to beyond any need to consider it only as mood music. Lage's background in jazz and Eldridge's penchant for bluegrass find common ground, emerging in a way that upends the parameters of both. Lovely and lilting at the same time, *Mount Royal* finds both men ensconced on a comfortable plateau. ***Lee Zimmerman***

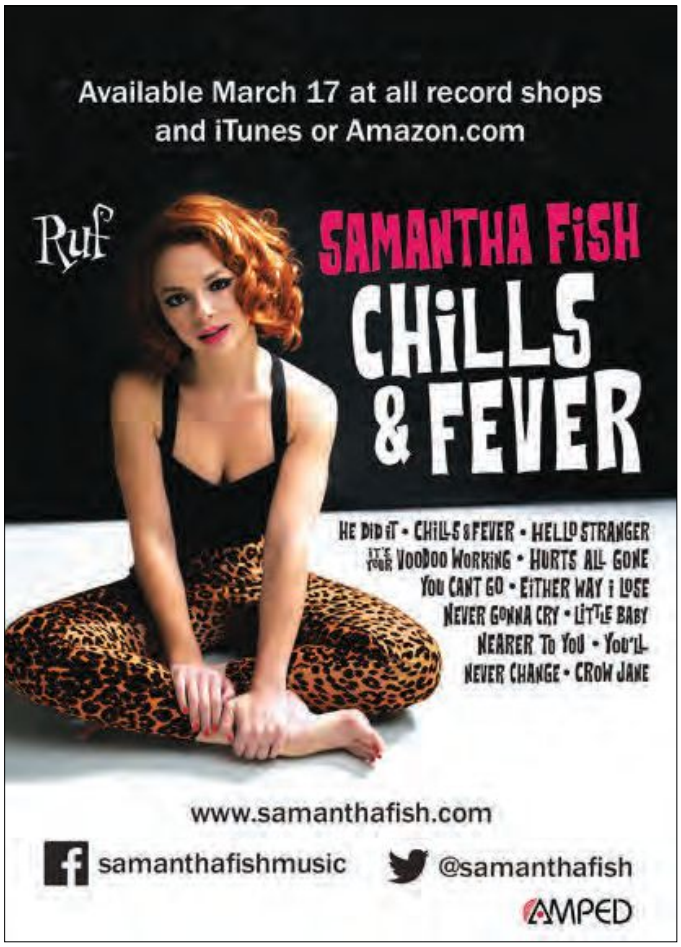
Landlady

The World Is a Loud Place

HOMETAPES

New York City band **Landlady** sound like the kids who were too weird to fit in with the high-school theater crowd and not square enough for the orchestra, but could've been stars in both. Their latest, *The World Is a Loud Place*, has hints

Landlady



Reviews

of the two—it's a sweeping, dramatic album, with complex, symphonic layers—but it's refreshingly odd and unpredictable. Just as bands like My Morning Jacket add a rainbow coat of paint to Southern rock, Landlady bathes their pop-rock in neon. Some songs break down to group singing with minimal percussion. Drummer **Booker Stardrum** creates jagged, mashed-up rhythms that rarely let you catch your breath. And vocalist **Adam Schatz** sings like he's delivering the final moments of some experimental monologue.

Like Menomena or Dirty Projectors before them, Landlady views pop-rock genre constructs as mere guidelines to stretch beyond. The resulting *The World Is a Loud Place* isn't exactly thrilling, but it's undeniably entertaining. The album packs enough musical twists and turns to keep an active listener guessing and a passive listener satisfied, with quick-adhesive hooks and hummable melodies. On the buzzing "Electric Abdomen," Schatz sings that "the beast within is unravelin'. You punch out the clock energized within. Your foot shakes once; there it goes again." This twitching energy rules the record, twirling through string arrangements just as it does through electric guitars. It's a *World* well worth visiting.

Justin Jacobs

Howe Gelb

Future Standards FIRE

There isn't a shortage of modern-day crooners eager to relive the times gone by, when the Rat Pack ruled the Vegas Strip and the Sands Hotel was home to their chummy hijinks. Some imagine themselves as reincarnations of Ol' Blue Eyes, revisiting the standards that ruled the airwaves before teen idols and prefab pretenders turned the tide forever. Yet, given the success of Michael Bublé and Harry Connick Jr., the spirit of Sinatra, singing his late-night lullabies, still lingers on. **Howe Gelb** is possessed by it as well. After more than 30 releases—on his own, with others and as part of Giant Sand—he's abandoned his sun-parched soundscapes, tossed his guitar and acid-etched imagery, and morphed into an after-hours barfly, serenading listeners with a whiskey-soaked moan that could make Nick Cave or Tom Waits clink their cocktail glasses in admiration, and maybe even envy. This shift in sensibilities seems to be a deliberate ploy, intended to couch his compositions as new additions to the Great American Songbook—all as imagined by Chet Baker, Mose Allison, Burt Bacharach and Leonard Cohen. By poise or pretense, Gelb carries that persona well, relying on little more than scant keyboards, a slinky shuffle and as much attitude as aptitude. Gelb's phrasing is loose and limber, often falling in behind the beat, adding a laconic feel fueled by desire and despair. Consequently, songs such as "Terribly So," "Ownin' It" and "Impossible Thing" should find the late-night crowd nodding their approval.

Lee Zimmerman

Laura Marling

Semper Femina

MORE ALARMING/KOBALT MUSIC

British folk singer **Laura Marling** has always been deft with a poetic line and a dulcet melody, which often urges her music to feel like it's been written specifically for the listener. *Semper Femina*, her sixth album, which was recorded with **Blake Mills**, isn't any different. The songs are quiet and careful, resonating with sincerity and emotional kindness. "The Valley" pairs an ethereal indie-folk melody with Marling's evocative croon, which she trails over the instrumental notes purposefully and languidly. "Wild Once" strips everything except that voice and a gently plucked acoustic

Laura Marling

Hollie Fernando

guitar, forcing you to listen to every line of the songwriter's lyrics. She has something real to say, even when it is veiled, and the lines here feel like they're being whispered right into your ear. Closing number "Nothing Not Nearly" amps up the volume–slightly–and lets Marling fast-talk her way through a pulsating number. Even then, when Marling pushes a little more forcefully, the singer still sounds like every sound and every word is thoughtful and decisive. She's done all this for a reason and an effect, and that effect has a subtle power. That final song surges with a forceful sentiment–that life is short and you have to seize it, especially when it comes to love. In this vein, like on past releases, Marling wants her songs to leave something behind with the audience. They're about reflection, which creeps up as the music unfolds–sort of like it was all meant for you to begin with. ***Emily Zemler***

Wild Beasts

Boy King DOMINO

Following 2014's *Present Tense* album, **Wild Beasts**' *Boy King* is an acerbic exploration of vulnerability and strength, a motif that is threaded through the album, from production to song arrangements to the songs themselves. But that vulnerable-versus-strong counterpoint is most present on "Tough Guy," where singer **Hayden Thorpe** confesses, "Now I'm all fucked up, and I can't stand up, so I'd better suck it up, like a tough guy would" over shimmering guitars reminiscent of *Here Come the Warm Jets*-era Phil Manzanera. "Big Cat," a commentary on corporate domination, leads with its gritty, electro-edged and metronome-fueled rock, with spacious arrangements lending enough room to highlight superbly idiosyncratic vocals. Wild Beasts had the good sense to bring in an even wilder sort, **John Congleton** (St. Vincent), who produced the record. The track "Get My Bang" is either about rampant consumerism or orgiastic sex, depending on whether analysis lends cerebral or sexual connotations. Either way, there's "no getting it right, no getting it wrong, just getting it on." As for the Beasts, they definitely got it on. ***Sara Jayne Crow***

Sam Bush

Storyman SUGAR HILL

The Earls of Leicester

Rattle & Roar ROUNDER

If the Jeopardy! answer was "**Jerry Douglas** and **Sam Bush**," then you'd get a "Correct" from Alex Trebek if the question was: "Who are two of the most celebrated bluegrass musicians in the modern world?" These virtuosos, although only in their 60s, have already been around for decades, each advancing the root form but also expanding beyond it. Now, they've both released new projects that show they are still at the top of their games. *Storyman*, from mandolin master Bush (who also plays fiddle, guitar and more, and of course sings lead), makes good on its title. Accompanied by a quartet bearing both acoustic and electric instruments–and, importantly, drums–Bush and his cohorts kick up plenty of dust on 11 original tunes, each co-written. One, "Carcinoma Blues," was created with the late Guy Clark; another, "Handmics Killed Country Music," by Bush and **Emmylou Harris** (who lends harmonies), is exactly what it suggests it's going to be: a wistful dream of the bygone days when country singers actually had to know how to play something with strings and not just stalk the stage. Douglas' release, like **The Earls of Leicester**'s first from 2014, features the dobro whiz in a sextet setting, paying tribute to the legacies of bluegrass gods Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. As such, it's more traditional in its approach than the Bush recording, but not any less stirring. Uptempo breakdowns, gospel ballads (the wonderful "Mother Prays Loud in Her Sleep") and displays of pure craftsmanship ("Steel Guitar Blues") accomplish the band's stated goal of throwing some light back on Flatt and Scruggs' contributions and reminding us that the tradition is in very good hands today. ***Jeff Tamarkin***

Itasca

Open to Chance

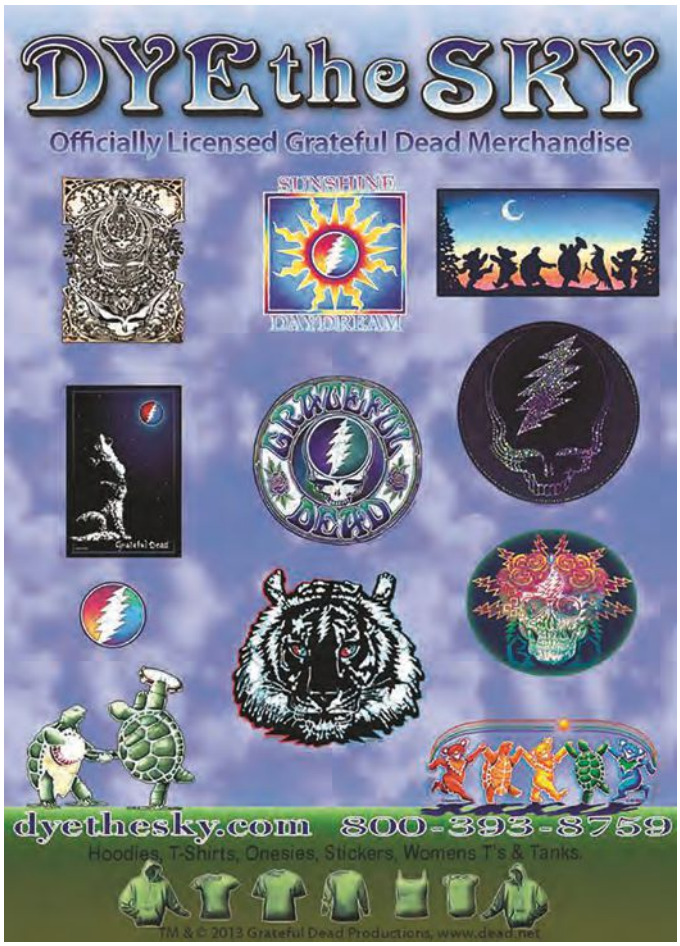
PARADISE OF BACHELORS

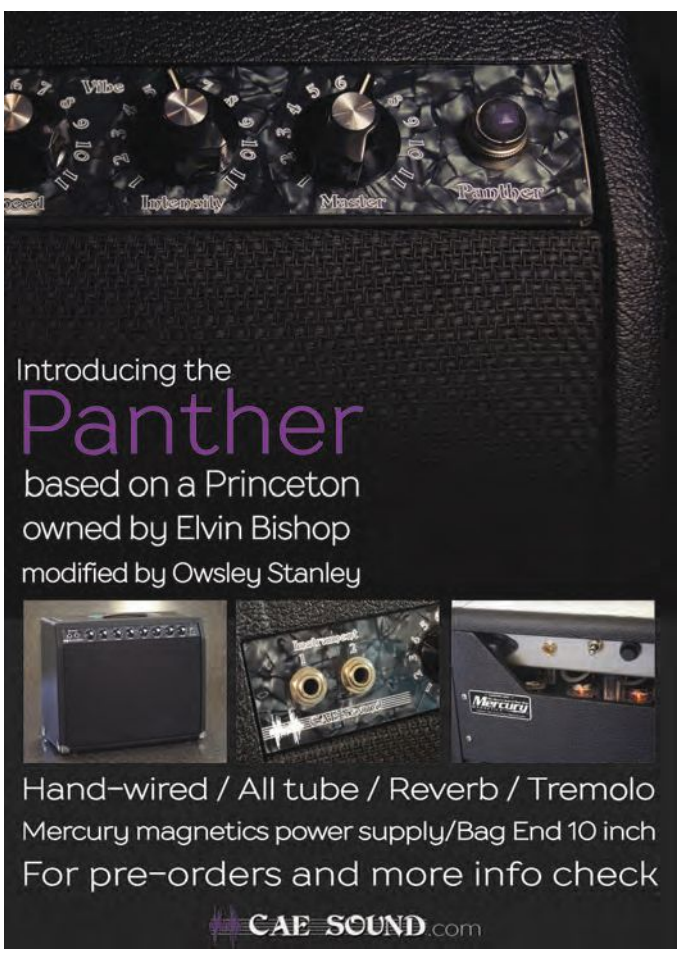
Recording under the name **Itasca**, Los Angeles guitarist and songwriter **Kayla Cohen** has charted evocative spaces and moody waters since her 2012 debut–the atmosphere often hard to separate from the composition. On *Open to Chance*, her third full-length and thoroughly magical debut for Paradise of Bachelors, Cohen makes her most fully realized music yet, accompanied in places by a band for the first time, and recorded crisply and cleanly throughout. Perfectly executed dream-folk, though that description hardly cuts it, she duets with pedal steel and softly stacked vocals ("Carousel"), paints never-ending choruses ("Buddy"), wends her way through canyons over beds of wordless hums and strings ("Just for Tomorrow"), and writes lyrics that imbue her music with elegant gravitas. Like Steve Gunn and others, Cohen integrates dexterous folk guitar into her songwriting, but Cohen does it better than almost anyone–the dancing and lyrical patterns of songs like "Right This Time" are also filled with rich detail. Cohen invites reference points to dozens of obscure California singer-songwriters, but *Open to Chance* charts a quietly ambitious mission on its own, as simultaneously accessible and rewarding as anything else in the indie-sphere, but without shedding a single ghost's worth of inscrutable mystery. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Lightnin Malcolm

Foot Soldier SHAKEDOWN

Lightnin Malcolm makes no bones about his allegiance to the blues, except for the bare-bones approach





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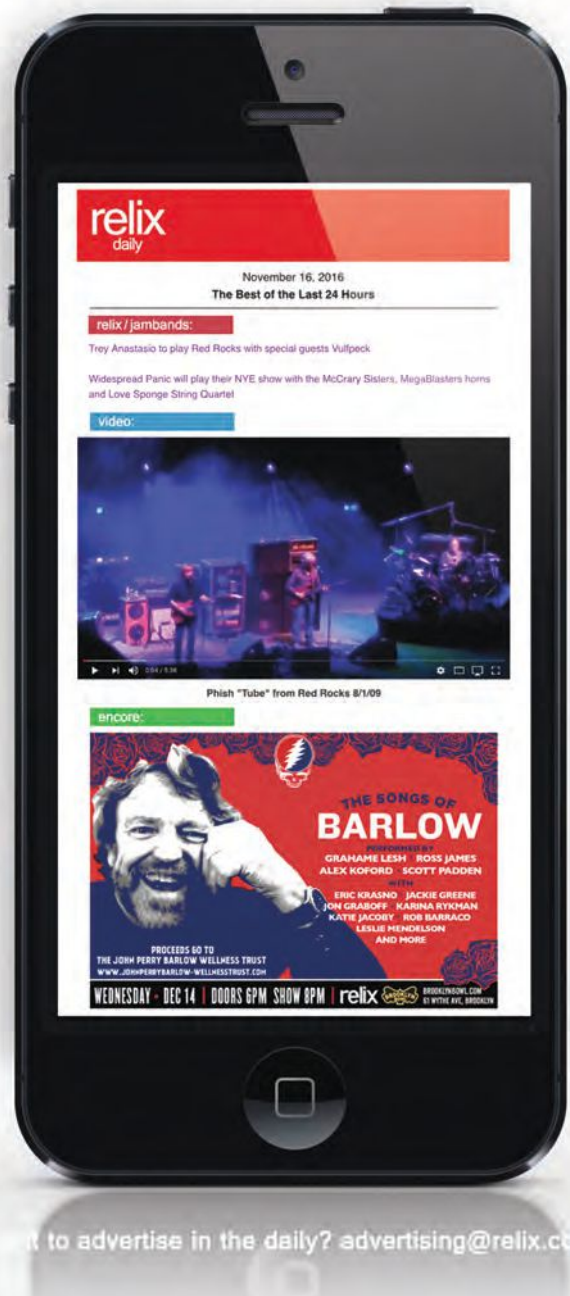

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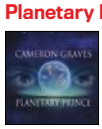
Reviews

he takes while asserting that style. Indeed, *Foot Soldier* finds him deep in the trenches, expressing himself with bluster, boogie and a seamless shuffle. A guitarist by trade, he bills himself as a one-man band, purveying a sound that's stark, surly, strident and unapologetically suggestive. Consequently, there really isn't much variation in form, and with titles like "Done Wrong," "Don't Bitch," "Gates of Hell" and "Treat That Woman Right," there's also little chance of mistaking the sentiment. Even the instrumentals tap into that tenacity. Regardless, it's some salacious suggestion that underscores "Best Friend's Wife," clearly identifying his intents. "I had a dream last night I was with my best friend's wife/ Well if I'm asleep I can't help it, what runs up on my mind." That's hardly the best defense, especially since Malcolm comes across as one whose dual aim seems both menacing and mischievous. Clearly, then, he's not as innocent as the song would have him appear. That also owes to his seductive style, which mostly refl cts influences of Muddy Waters, Hendrix and Howlin' Wolf–artists that were branded with an intimidating image. Of course, the blues rarely comes across as tepid. Consequently, *Foot Soldier* fi ds Lightnin Malcolm taking the offensive, with potent playing as his weapon of choice. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Cameron Graves

Planetary Prince MACK AVENUE



If pianist **Cameron Graves**' debut album bears more than a passing resemblance to saxophonist **Kamasi Washington's** 2015 breakout, *The Epic*, then that isn't a coincidence: Washington is featured here, Graves was on *The Epic* and both projects share other personnel from the LA-based collective West Coast Get Down. Despite that, any similarities are more about mutual audaciousness than approach. Graves is a commanding enough personality that he utterly dominates the album's eight tracks, even while deep inside a labyrinthine groove with his fellow virtuosos, among them the prodigious **Bruner** brothers (bassist **Stephen**, aka **Thundercat**, and the reliably maniacal drummer **Ronald**). The title track is a steamrolling slab of twisted funk that makes mockery of time signature itself. When Graves embarks on his first jaw-dropping solo around two minutes in, it's immediately apparent that his is a truly original and exciting new voice on the instrument; you just don't want him to stop. The three other tracks originally from Graves' self-released EP, each coasting past 10 minutes, are equally paralyzing. "Adam & Eve" is, at once, accessible and dense–its core melody more suggestion than definition–while both "Andromeda" and "Isle of Love" refuse to adhere to stylistic convention. This is goosebump masterful.
Jeff Tamarkin

Warpaint

Heads Up ROUGH TRADE

Heads Up, the third LP from all-lady quartet **Warpaint**, is a record that feels deliciously uneasy–fi led with squirming grooves and dark shadows. It's a dirty little secret of an album, perfect for a crowded metro where no one could guess what's happening in your headphones. Since the band debuted with their 2008 EP, *Exquisite Corpse*, they've been appropriately adored as an experimental rock, art-rock and even dream-pop band. But the Warpaint of *Heads Up* is far more focused and, simply put, better. The triple vocals of guitarists **Emily Kokal** and **Theresa Wayman** and bassist **Jenny Lee Lindberg** give these snaking melodies impressive depth–harmonies arise through the mist. That atmosphere is colored with echoing guitar squalls and far-off ianos, but it's Lindberg and drummer **Stella Mozgawa** that make Heads Up great, as minimalist basslines and precise percussion cause each song to lurch forward. There's a desperation in the lyrics– "Don't break down," "I won't give up on you," "Don't wanna defend myself" and others show up throughout. Mixed with these almost post-punk beats, *Heads Up* is sparse, jittery and utterly captivating.
Justin Jacobs

Buck Curran

Immortal Light OBSOLETE

For those who dig their acoustic folk on the mystic side, there's guitarist **Buck Curran**'s solo debut, *Immortal Light*. One-half of Arborea, Curran's fi st album under his own name invokes swarming natural forces, looking for the borderline between the real and the sublime and, maybe, the supernatural. On "New Moontide," Curran is joined by Arborea partner **Shanti Deschaine**, who provides the requisite ethereal voice to help set the course, though Curran's guitar ably handles that task without the compass aid of lyrics. On instrumental compositions like the warm electric drone of "Andromeda" and the interlocking acoustic piece "River Unto Sea," layered guitar parts move together in gentle consort, conjuring the drift of currents and achieving the time of no time, of stillness within movement. In the midst, Curran and Deschaine take a striking minor-keyed turn through John Fogerty's "Bad Moon Rising," always a topical song in a dystopia, and perhaps one of its few real reinventions since Creedence Clearwater Revival's original. The album-concluding 13-minute title track synthesizes all: the carefully rendered acoustics, the painterly electrics, the sacred drones, Deschaine's ethereal vocal presence (and harmonium) and–for a long moment–tangible transportation.
Jesse Jarnow

Deap Vally
FEMEJISM NEVADO

LA duo **Deap Vally** arrived with their debut album *Sistrionix* in 2013, a collection of brash garage songs that reminded fans why the music scene so badly needs more raucous, swaggering rock. The pair's follow-up, a gritty, bluesy album dubbed *FEMEJISM*, is like The White Stripes meets Black Rebel Motorcycle Club, and it heavily amps up the strut from the first effo t. "Julian," a boisterous track with surging, almost chaotic electric riffs, sets the tone, revealing a band that successful brings the energy of the stage onto their recording, which was helmed by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs' **Nick Zinner**. "Little Baby Beauty Queen" aptly balances powerhouse, reverb-heavy guitars with an introspective vocal melody, howled with fervor by the two musicians. The album is not a constant push of aggression, though: On "Critic," the instruments pull back and settle, offering a more stripped-down sense of rock-and-roll. Zinner's presence is felt throughout, particularly in the moments where Deap Vally takes on a resemblance to the wide-eyed intensity of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs. (See: "Post Funk.") *FEMEJISM* unabashedly asserts itself through your speakers in an almost tangible way but, it's clear, as it unveils itself, it's an album that will be best seen live and in your face. ***Emily Zemler***

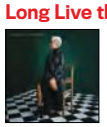
Ian Hunter & The Rant Band
Fingers Crossed PROPER

Ian Hunter's **Rant Band** may never have the following of Mott the Hoople, but that band's sound reverberates throughout the music of his new aggregation, bringing a nod of recognition to longtime fans. On "That's When Trouble Starts," the fi st track on *Fingers Crossed*, Hunter explores the topics of aging and mortality, subjects that have concerned him on his last few releases. The band lays down a mid-tempo, glam-rock groove as he sings, "After your 15 minutes of fame—look out!" You can sense the smile on his face as he addresses the passing of his own moment in the spotlight, with the ironic humor that's always been his trademark. He deals more seriously with mortality on "You Can't Live in the Past," a number with a slow, somber reggae feel that's amplified by dub effects on the rhythm guitar. Images of drunken evenings and unhappy marriages float through the grim memories of a man coming to terms with the end of his life. He's more upbeat on "Bow Street Runners," a tune that sings the praises of vigilante justice in old London, and "Ghosts," a song that describes the journey of British rockers coming to America to search out the roots of the music they love. The album's most compelling track is "Dandy," Hunter's tribute to David Bowie. He borrows melodic fragments from "All the Young Dudes," the Bowie-penned tune that gave Mott their first hit, and uses quotes from Bowie's lyrics to sing the praises of his fallen friend and mentor. ***J. Poet***

Gerry Beckley
Carousel BLUE ÉLAN

Truth be told, there's little diff rence between a **Gerry Beckley** solo excursion and anything offered up by America, the day job he's held for more than 45 years. So, chalk up his new individual effort as an attempt to avoid creative compromise, or maybe it's simply a desire to answer to no one other than himself. The soft California sound that he and his partner Dewey Bunnell helped patent so long ago remains intact, providing *Carousel* with plenty of familiar fare. The only difference is that Beckley occasionally chooses outside material that fits his template, with songs such as Spirit's "Nature's Way," the classic Merseyside sing-along "Don't Let the Sun Catch You Crying" and a chamber-pop take on Gerry Rafferty's "To Each and Everyone" easily fitting into his dewy-eyed delivery. Beckley's vocals remain as smooth and silken as ever, and given executive producer **Jeff Larson**'s supple mix, the material practically glides out of these grooves. To be sure, Beckley plays the lion's share of the instruments here, making this a solo set in every sense of the word. America gives Beckley that freedom, allowing *Carousel* to spin freely as well. ***Lee Zimmerman***

Emeli Sandé
Long Live the Angels VIRGIN



Listening to **Emeli Sandé** wail on "Hurts," an evocative, surging ballad on her new album, *Long Live the Angels*, it's hard to believe that she isn't just as famous as Adele. "Loving you/ the way I do/ it hurts," the singer howls. And as she sings it, you feel it. Sandé, who released her debut album, *Our Version of Events*, in 2012, knows exactly how to infuse every single note of her music with emotional heft. Each song on this album, which feels heartbroken and searching, has genuine feeling that is familiar and relatable. "Lonely," a stripped-down acoustic number that effectively isolates Sandé's voice, leaves you first with the sense of what it means to be alone and then with the sense that this song's existence makes you less so. "Sweet Architect" is a soulful, heartfelt ballad that pines for a lost love (sample lyric: "I've been lonely since the day you left"). The singer's ache is palpable throughout not just this song, but the rest as well. The album is mostly sad, with loss invoked frequently, but Sandé doesn't sound pessimistic. "Every Single Little Piece" has an upbeat sensibility, as the singer reclaims her power and strength alongside the listener, deciding that love is worth it after all that. It's a powerful album, and it's one that anyone who's ever been heartbroken will find solace in. ***Emily Zemler***

Michael Chapman
50 PARADISE OF BACHELORS

English singer-songwriter **Michael Chapman** may lack household-name status, but among a certain breed of record-heads—including Kurt Vile, Lucinda Williams and Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore—he's a revered figure. Emerging from the same British folk scene that fostered John Martyn and David Bowie (whom he introduced to guitarist Mick Ronson), Chapman initially made his name on the progressive Harvest label. But unlike so many lost treasures, he refused to fade into obscured histories, continuing a long recording and performing career. Along the way, he informed the work of young artists like **Steve Gunn**, who—with members of The Black Twig Pickers and Rhyton—accompanies him on his new album, *50*. Picking up where their fi st collaboration with Gunn, *Cantos de Lisboa* left off, the band here proves sympathetic to Chapman's mood, locking into banjo-led ambling on "A Spanish Incident (Ramón and Durango)" and a ragged shuffle on "The Prospector." Chapman wears the patina of age well, locking in with the band for suspended, stately fare like "Falling From Grace" and "The Mallard," and on the unfolding jam "Rosh Pina" (included in the digital/CD editions of the album), he and Gunn lock into a psychic staredown worthy of his classic *Fully Qualified Survivor*. Rarely do "young buck/heritage artist" team-ups produce such exceptional work. ***Jason Woodbury***

Brooke Waggoner
Sweven SWOON MOON

If you happened to catch **Brooke Waggoner**'s excellent 2013 disc, *Originator*, then you heard a classically trained singer-songwriter with a refined ear for art-pop and rock, who seems to draw from sources as eclectic as Rodgers & Hammerstein, Godspell, Laura Nyro and Electric Light Orchestra. But here's the rub: Her flair for great hooks is so elastic, and her lyrics are so crafty, moving and personal that she's carved out a style all her own. *Sweven* kicks it up a notch, so much so that when Waggoner shouts "Widow Maker" over a creepy, hard-rocking organ groove ("I've got a loss on my hands... Oh, how I'm missing my man!"), or lifts the beautiful "Pennies and Youth" into a summery stratosphere, it feels like she's taking you along for the ride. Jack White certainly thought so when he asked her to play keyboards on both of his solo albums and join his touring band—and now we really know why. ***Bill Murphy***

Warpaint

People of the North

The Caul THRILL JOCKEY

Spun-off from Brooklyn drone-jam mainstays Oneida, **People of the North** is a two-man subunit featuring keyboardist **Bobby Matador** and drummer **Kid Millions**. Creating in the deepest and most abstract free-music tradition, the paired performers have released five full-lengths in about the same amount of years. Shedding Oneida's propulsive grooves, the longtime weird-rock comrades converse in rhythmic micro-dialects—chaos without disassociation. While most of People of the North's effo ts have drawn from the Oneida irregulars, *The Caul* drafts **Jamie Saft** from the avant-jazz world, helping Millions and Matador trace out more definite and subtly melodic shapes than they've found before, especially on "Surfacing," where Millions' drums chatter in audible response to Matador's volume swells and Saft's swaying thoughts. Sometimes blending together in rich, synaesthetic harmony, the trio's rhythms and melodies switch identities freely and fl idly—a musical landscape that privileges only their ability to envision it. On the nearly 20-minute title track, a low, menacing rumble becomes a launching point for a hyperactive duo jam. Perhaps existential in its disruption, *The Caul* is anything but bleak, a long-term dialogue rendered across an LP's worth of singular moments. ***Jesse Jarnow***

Sarah Jarosz

Undercurrent SUGAR HILL

Sarah Jarosz recorded her fi st album, *Song Up in Her Head*, when she was 18. Now 25, she's a Grammy favorite. *Undercurrent* shows off subtle virtuosity on guitar, banjo and octave mandolin, as well impressive songwriting. Then there's that voice—a pure, shimmering alto that keeps you hanging on every word. "Still Life" is a smoldering torch song with Jarosz conveying passionate love with a teardrop-choked vocal supported by **Sara Watkins**' yearning violin fills. "Take Another Turn" features Jarosz and her guitar, expressing the desperate need one feels when a relationship ends abruptly—do you give up or try to hold on? "Early Morning Light" has the timeless feel of a folk classic. Her delicate fi gerpicking supports a forlorn vocal and adds a mournful power to a lyric full of grief and loss. She rocks out a bit on "Comin' Undone," an uplifting ode to the power of music with an anthemic chorus, and shows off er country side on "Back of My Mind," the tale of a gal who'd rather live with her bittersweet memories than the day-to-day pain of an unfulfilling relationship. ***J. Poet***

The Narrowbacks

Arrogance & Ignorance

SELF-RELEASED

The Narrowbacks make music that is decidedly meant to be listened to in a crowded bar. The New York-based six-piece brings the energy required for such circumstances, but with enough restraint that the subtle instrumental and vocal melodies—along with the not-so-subtle sing-along choruses—can be easily discerned in the bedlam, making for a satisfying experience whether drinking alone or with old friends. Either way, there probably should be whiskey involved. The band shows off a ew of their sides with *Arrogance & Ignorance*, however. At their most bombastic, The Narrowbacks nod to the collective Irish heritage of their members, crafting tunes that are well-informed by traditional Irish music, but with a punk edge—like Dropkick Murphys songs with less aggression, better vocals and more of a singer-songwriter air about them—such as album standout "Loisaida," ska-infused opener "The Banner County" and the soccer-stadium-rallying-cry of "Ole." The more reserved moments of the album, like "Prodigal Son" and "Out on the Avenue," nevertheless maintain that driving shuffle, allowing the band's lyrics to shine through a bit more—telling stories of New York City, love, loss and, of course, whiskey. ***Matt Inman***

Holy Sons

In the Garden PARTISAN

Emil Amos, who performs and records under the name **Holy Sons**, is working backward. In 2015, Holy Sons released a record called *Fall of Man*. Now, Amos is addressing the period before we were cast out of paradise. Or maybe he's fixating on the brief moment when the first couple had knowledge of good and evil but hadn't yet been banished from Eden. The biblical framework might seem like a stretch, but Amos has often demonstrated hints of a dark theological, philosophical perspective. Holy Sons has evolved from its lo-fi IY origins. In recent years, Amos has veered more toward lush but brooding Pink Floyd-ish sounds—biting, sustained guitars with piano and layered vocal harmonies. A climate of spiritual damage, ominous servitude, alienation and psychic imprisonment has always pervaded Holy Sons records. It remains. "I need to put myself back together again," sings Amos on "Original Sin." Amos plays everything on the record, and this is a strange thing to say, but one almost wishes that he would work with a more technically limited drummer than himself because some of the deft tom fills and crisp drag rolls on the snare almost distract from the rest of what he's doing. Still, it's a lovely, if unsettling, record. ***John Adamian***

The Narrowbacks

OFF THE TRACKS

Robert Randolph & the Family Band

Got Soul SONY

Considering he grew up playing in the "sacred steel" tradition of the Pentacostal church, there's a sanctified aura that emanates from just about anything **Robert Randolph** lays his hands on—that includes, most important, his Fessenden pedal-steel guitar. Of course, as Al Green, Aretha Franklin and many more have taught us, it's just a short distance from the sacred pews to the secular streets, where soul, funk and the get-down transport the music to another dimension of uplift. *Got Soul*, Randolph's fifth studio album with his **Family Band**, deftly manages to straddle both worlds, from the gospel jump of "She Got Soul" (spurred by Randolph's stirring vocal intro) to the Southern-fried swing of "Love Do What It Do," with **Darius Rucker** channeling Taj Mahal in convincing fashion on the mic. For sheer guitartistry, Randolph delivers his most accomplished work yet; "I Thank You" (with a nod to the ZZ Top version, by way of Isaac Hayes) comes across as a righteous psychedelic, soul romp, while "Travelin' Cheeba Man" hits the accelerator with the signature quick-pickin' that often leaves Eric Clapton himself slackjawed with wonder. ***Bill Murphy***

Amelia White

Home Sweet Hotel WHITE WOLF

Amelia White is based in Nashville but leads the life of a touring musician, winning audiences over with her low-key tales of the joys and sorrows of a working musician's life on the road. Her music is equal parts country, folk and moody rock, marked by smoky vocals and an ability to illuminate the darker corners of the human heart. **Marco Giovino** (Band of Joy, Buddy Miller) produced the album and complements her quiet vocals with stabs of distorted guitar, a dense backbeat and wordless, wailing female harmonies that intensify White's desolate narratives. The grinding, distorted guitar rhythms of "Dogs Bark" open up into a lighter gospel-flavored chorus that helps to underline the bitterly ironic tagline's delivery: "Even if you ain't got nothing to say, you're gonna open your big mouth anyway." The bright country-rock beat of "Leaving in My Blood" contrasts with the song's sinister "I'm gonna hurt you if you love me" message, while the album closer, "Six Feet Down," finally offers a bit of grim hope, as White urges her lover to forget the world's chaos, come to bed and embrace this fleeting moment of tenderness and love. ***J. Poet***

Plundering the Vaults

Washington Phillips

Washington Phillips and His Manzarene Dreams DUST-TO-DIGITAL

Washington Phillips is like the flip side to Blind Willie Johnson. Both Texans played otherworldly gospel blues, but where Johnson had a blasted-asphalt voice, Phillips sang with an ethereal loveliness, transcendently airy when paired with the mysterious sound of his homemade "manzarene," a double zither that he invented. These recordings, made in the late '20s, have taken some time to reach their status as cult objects. People like Ry Cooder, Gillian Welch and the Palace Brothers have covered some of Phillips' songs of scripture, faith, death, resurrection and redemption over the years, helping to spread the glory of his haunting music. Phillips sounds a little like a preacher/singer bursting with soul-ache—someone who's being accompanied by a strange music box or a distant merry-go-round tune. It's as compelling an argument for the existence of the divine as anything else out today. This music has been released in other forms before, but what makes this box set and 76-page book compelling, especially for devoted fans of Phillips', is that the set corrects erroneous biographical information, particularly about the name and type of instrument he played, which had long perplexed listeners and writers. Phillips was a virtuoso player and an instrument maker. He lived longer (until 1954) than had been previously thought. His family's history is told—with expert research and sleuthing skills—by **Michael Corcoran**, starting with his grandfather's birth into slavery in Kentucky in 1801, and including details about Phillips' later life in a small town where no one knew of his recording career. Washington Phillips played some with Blind Lemon Jefferson and was discovered by Frank B. Walker, the scout who went on to sign Hank Williams for MGM. His music is timeless and beautiful, certainly deserving of the loving attention given to it in this elaborate and in-depth set.

John Adamian

The Doors

London Fog 1966

RHINO/BRIGHT MIDNIGHT ARCHIVES

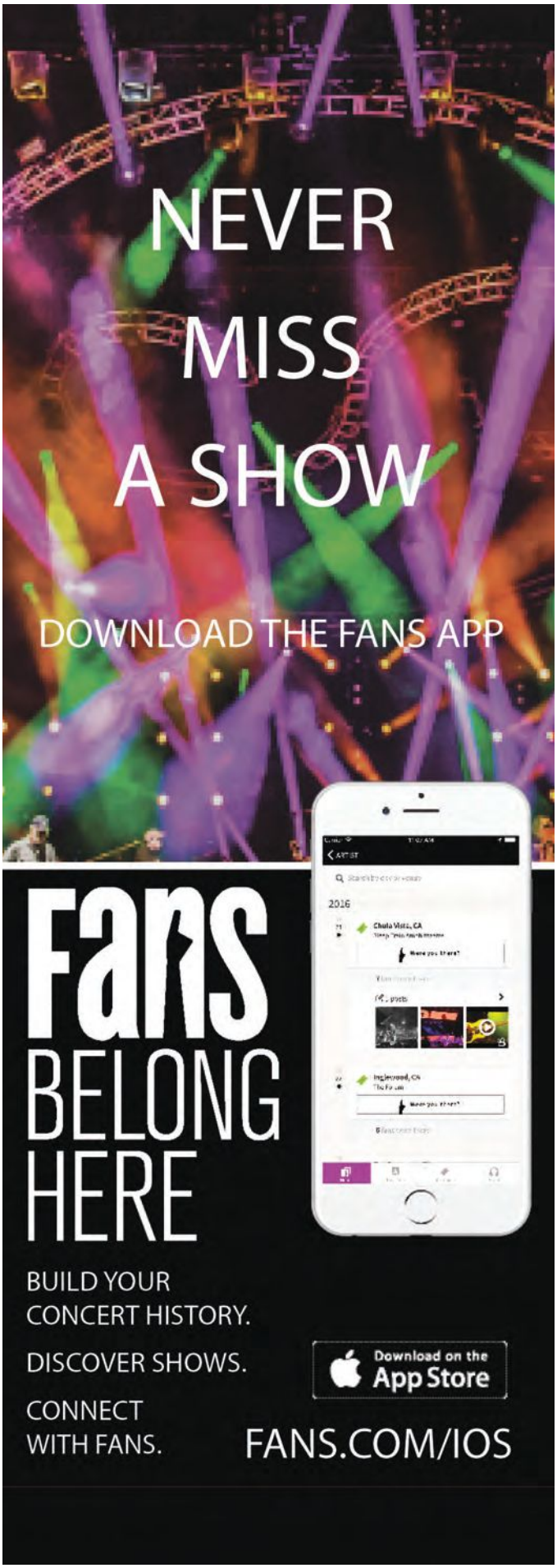
Most bands, when they're fi st starting out, are lost in the wilderness; that's just the way it is. It takes any group of musicians time to find that sweet spot where their individual artistic personalities coalesce into a new collective entity. Apparently, from what we can hear on this rare 1966 gig, the four guys in this group came into it with well-defined ideas and serious skill sets and, equally important, a willingness to be flexible and figure out how to interact with the others until that original voice emerged. **The Doors** had already been together for a year when they became regulars at the London Fog, a Sunset Strip nightclub where they had the freedom to experiment and work out their material in front of open-minded audiences. This recently discovered relic, although only a little more than a half hour, captures one random night at the venue. Already, the four components have staked out their own spots; a sound and attitude are in place. **Jim Morrison, Ray Manzarek**, **Robby Krieger** and **John Densmore** are not quite where they would be on their soon-to-be-recorded debut album, but they're close, unmistakably The Doors. The couple of original tunes—"Strange Days" and "You Make Me Real" (which wouldn't turn up on an album until *Morrison Hotel* four years later)—are fully developed, and the covers—blues, soul and rock-and-roll standards like Wilson Pickett's "Don't Fight It" and Little Richard's "Lucille"—have already been molded to their specs. All but the most hardcore fans should take heed though—despite the fascinating and often exciting performance, the sound quality is fairly abysmal.

Jeff Tamarkin

Gillian Welch

Boots No. 1—The Offici Revival Bootleg ACONY

Whether you want to call it Americana, roots music, folk or something else, **Gillian Welch** has been at the forefront of it since she first emerged 20 years ago with *Revival*, her **T Bone Burnett**-produced debut album. It seemed to come from another time and place—the plaintive voice and simple picking, words that could just as easily have been sung in 1920s Appalachia as 1990s LA. ("I am an orphan on God's highway/ But I'll share my troubles if you go my way/ I have no mother, no father/ No sister, no brother/ I am an orphan girl.") *Boots No. 1* revisits that debut: Its two discs of outtakes, demos, alternate mixes and live recordings don't so much suggest a reimagining as they do a path deeper inside. As on the finished, official release, Welch is accompanied throughout by multi-instrumentalist/vocalist **David Rawlings**, who has been integral to her music ever since. Their chemistry is already evident on the rough song sketch of "Acony Bell," which closes out the program, and the alternate take of "One More Dollar," minus the backing instruments that Burnett would add to the album track (using heavyweights like **James Burton** and **Jim Keltner**). As for the outtakes, several are quite good, but it's difficult to imagine, with two decades of hindsight, any of them having made the original album any stronger than it already was. *Boots No. 1* (which, as its title suggests, is only the first in a series) isn't so much a way of saying here's what could have been as it is a reminder of something that was perfect the way it was. *Jeff Tamarkin*



Miles Davis

Freedom Jazz Dance: The Bootleg Series Vol. 5 COLUMBIA/LEGACY

Like the previous four releases in **Miles Davis**' "Bootleg Series," the newest aims to offer an insider's peek into the creation of the music. But this one goes deeper. Whereas the earlier sets presented live recordings as heard by concert audiences, this time, we're in the studio as Davis and his so-called Second Great Quintet–pianist **Herbie Hancock**, saxophonist **Wayne Shorter,** bassist **Ron Carter** and drummer **Tony Williams**, together five of the most important musicians in all of jazz–work out the tracks that would ultimately become 1967's *Miles Smiles* album (with some ending up on other projects). To be a fly on the wall as the band goes through its paces making music out of raw ideas is a gift; to hear the differences on master takes and alternates, sometimes subtle, sometimes not at all, is both instructive and fascinating. Some of the listening requires patience–there's a lot of studio chatter (not all of it audible) and not all listeners will want to hear successive takes, usually two of each piece. For those who make the effort, though, the rewards are vast: Many, including "Nefertiti" (which would be released a couple of years later on its own same-titled album), "Footprints" and "Water Babies," are Shorter compositions that would define his own genius as well as further Miles' reputation as a creative force. In a couple more years, Miles Davis would move on to *Bitches Brew* and a whole other aesthetic, and on *Freedom Jazz Dance*, we hear the seeds of that explosive growth taking root.

Jeff Tamarkin

Mickey Hart

Planet Drum (25th Anniversary Edition)

UNIVERSAL/VERVE

When talking about the most influential world-music recordings of the last 30 years, *Planet Drum* surely belongs in the same conversation as Paul Simon's *Graceland* or the Ry Cooder-produced *Buena Vista Social Club*–and by influential, we don't mean merely popular. For better or worse, *Graceland* and *BVSC* came with a political backstory that was essential to their appeal; one endured charges of enabling South Africa's apartheid apparatus (a complaint that was overshadowed by the album's sheer artistry), while the other resurrected a long-lost musical style that had been hidden from view for generations by the Cuban Revolution.

Planet Drum didn't engender a political discussion–if anything, the underlying message was environmental consciousness–but as a testament to **Mickey Hart**'s insatiable musical curiosity, it broke unusual ground. Prior to the album's 1991 release, no one had thought to unite some of the world's master percussionists–**Zakir Hussain**, **Babatunde Olatunji**, **Airto Moreira** and more–for a collaborative summit. On an equal footing, Hart and his compatriots generate an all-enveloping, hypnotic sound that's built on mystical and healing properties, from the lilting textures of "Island Groove" (punctuated by **Sikiru Adepoju**'s talking drum) to the strange rhythms of "Temple Caves" (fueled by Hussain's incomparable tabla chops) and the Brazil-flavored dreamscape "Sea of Showers" (a bonus track for this package, featuring **Flora Purim** and Olatunji on vocals). It's fitting that *Planet Drum* won the first Grammy in the world-music category, and inspired a wave of would-be percussionists to take up an instrument. As big-name drum circles go, this one will never be topped. *Bill Murphy*

Johnnie Frierson

Have You Been Good to Yourself

LIGHT IN THE ATTIC

Originally a cassette-only DIY release that found its way into the hands of an astute thrift-shopping record collector in Memphis, this lo-fi recording is disarmingly heartfelt and raw, like a primitivist gospel transmission of stripped-down guitar, foot-stomping accompaniment and deeply expressive vocals. **Johnnie Frierson** came from a musical family, and his guitar playing ranges from skeletal to jazzy. But the sentiment and spirit of these songs is so powerful–a soulful expression of the Golden Rule with notes of Christian forgiveness, divine purpose and grace threaded throughout. And Frierson's singing covers a whole range of emotions, using howls, coos and exhortatory outbursts. The title song will bring tears to your eyes, if you're inclined that way, and its simple articulation of the truth–like the repeated line "When you mistreat yourself/ then you mistreat your children"–has a lightning-bolt potency to it. Equally moving is the why-am-I-here meditation "You Were Sent to This World." Fans of the epic, obscure gospel anthology *This May Be My Last Time Singing* will want to get this one. There's a lot of pain and searching that comes through on this recording. One doesn't need to share Friedson's religious perspective to be moved by his expression of faith.

NRBQ

John Adamian

The Doors

Bobby Klein (The Doors)

The Creation

Action Painting

NUMERO GROUP

Many music fans had their first and main exposure to **The Creation** from the near-perfect soundtrack to Wes Anderson's 1998 film *Rushmore*. Their 1966 single "Making Time," about workplace drudgery, has an aggressive, combustible, chopping riff that's both jarring and catchy. The mid-to-late '60s mod scene in England was a unique pop moment–if others were trying to sound like Chicago bluesmen, the mods fashioned their own sound from garage rock, psychedelia, soul and a touch of music hall, all delivered with art-school brashness. The Creation weren't the biggest of the bunch, but they can sound like a first-rate combination of elements from The Who, Small Faces, The Kinks and The Hollies. This collection, compiled by the Numero Group, gathers for the first time the complete recordings of The Creation, and **The Mark Four**, the band's earlier incarnation, in a 2-CD set of 42 tracks recorded between 1965 and 1968. (A number of not entirely necessary new stereo mixes are included as well.) An 80-page book with photos and music-history essays rounds

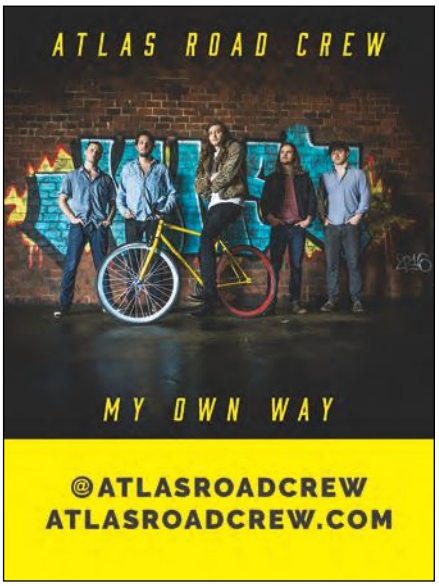
out the package. "Making Time" might be the band's pinnacle, but The Creation had plenty of energy and attitude. Songs like "Try and Stop Me" and "Painter Man" (about the demise of fine art in the age of commercialism) stand up well next to the best jams from the era. Particularly gnarly is the snarling trippiness of "How Does It Feel to Feel" and the menacing, kaleidoscopic slow-burn of "Through My Eyes." At their heaviest, The Creation could suggest a poppier version of early Pink Floyd. This is one for all those who enjoy the "underrated genius" variety of reissue project. *John Adamian*

Mickey Hart and Planet Drum

NRBQ

High Noon–A 50-Year Retrospective OMNIVORE

It's probably a good thing that **NRBQ** never became famous. Who knows what we would have lost if success had gone to their heads, if they'd started playing by the rules and doing the kinds of things that normal bands did? This is a group, after all, that opened its debut album, in 1969, with back-to-back covers of songs by rockabilly great Eddie Cochran and out-there jazz iconoclast Sun Ra. Now it's a half-century later and they're still going–although keyboard genius **Terry Adams** is the sole remaining original–and there's a huge enough body of work to be gathered up into this way essential five-CD set. The chronology is all out of whack, but who cares? The guiding principles of unpredictability and going for broke and having a blast and keeping it real have never wavered. Go ahead and put it on random shuffle–those perfectly crafted pop-rock tunes like "Rain at the Drive-In" and "Ridin' in My Car" are right at home next to the driving anthems "Me and the Boys" and "Crazy Like a Fox," and the nothin' but fun "Dr. Howard, Dr. Fine, Dr. Howard" and "Terry Got a Muffin" (and the weird shit, too). It's all just one big bunch o' lovable Q madness: insane rockabilly licks, avant-garde jazz-piano excursions, horn-powered sweet soul music, **Carl Perkins** and **John Sebastian** guesting, silliness and virtuosity like you can't believe, and pro wrestling, too. There are live tracks/rarities and...oh, just get it and hear for yourself. Even if most folks still don't know who they are, there's a reason some of us just never shut up about them. *Jeff Tamarkin*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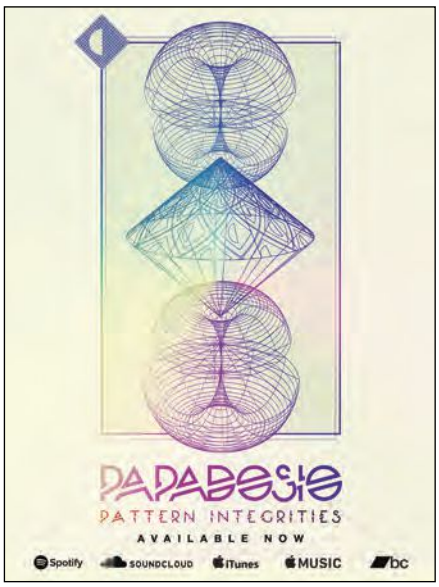
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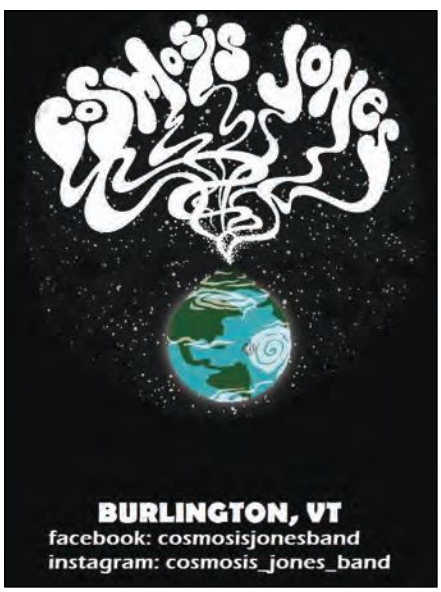
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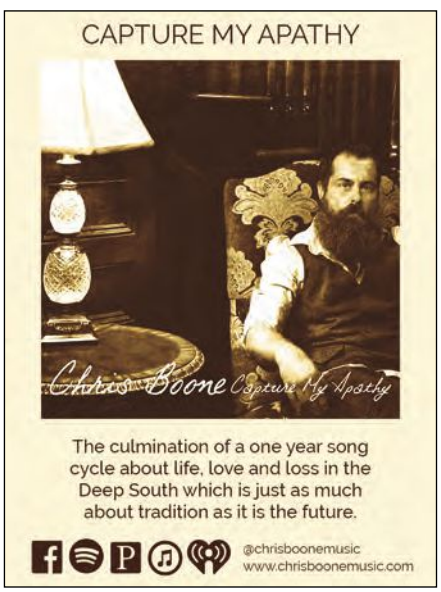
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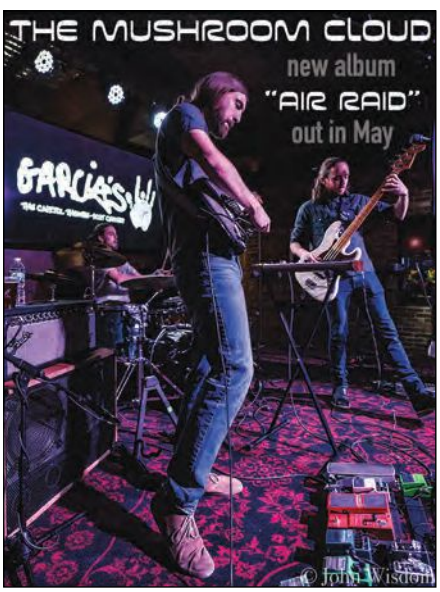
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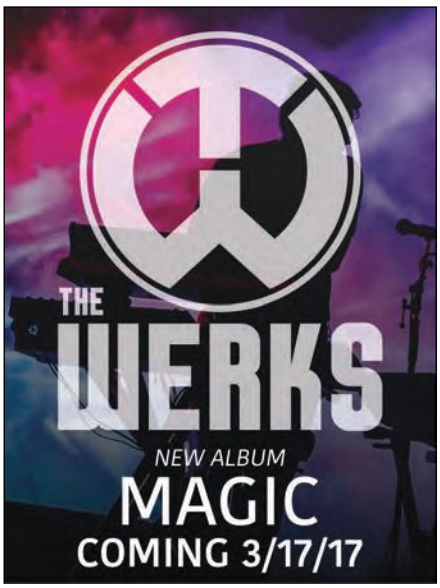

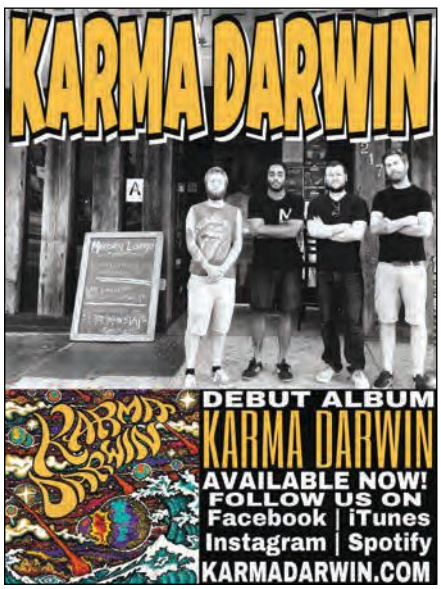

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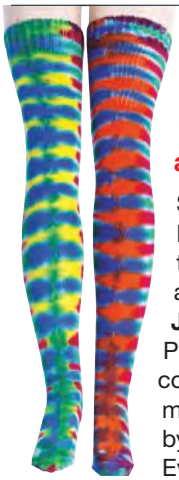

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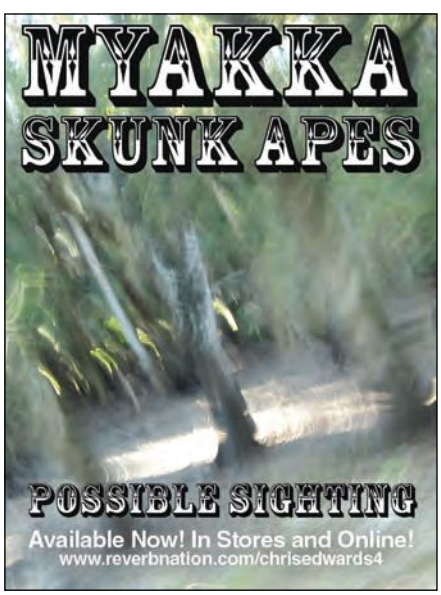


carve out enough time, and we were able to cut the basic tracks together as a band at Electric Lady Studios. Then, once we started working on it, people could come in on their own schedule and do a vocal or an overdub of something. But other than the scheduling challenge, it was very natural to be back together.

What led you to regroup?

Over the years of doing the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame induction dinners, I met Seymour Stein, the legendary record man. He is very knowledgeable about the stuff that I love, like early R&B—he worked for Syd Nathan at King Records, for God's sake. Anyway, on a social evening, he said to me: "Now that your TV thing with Letterman is coming to an end, maybe you want to get back into the record thing?" I was thrilled to, so he signed me.

I said to him, "What kind of music do you see me doing?" I am, after all, a studio cat, who prides himself on being able to do anything when called on, but I didn't have anything at that time that I could consider my own music. He just said, "People want to see *you*. They want to hear *you*." Then he suggested two songs that we ended up doing on the record: "Just Because," the Lloyd Price number, which I sing, and the obscure Sam Cooke song "Win Your Love for Me," which the great Dion of The Belmonts sings. Dion just killed it—his performance is fantastic.

Other than the songs that Seymour suggested, how did you select the material?

I relied very heavily on my producer, Richard Gottehrer. I had worked for him in the '70s when I was doing studio work, and we made a number of records together, including a beautiful one by Joan Armatrading called *Me Myself I* that he produced and I played on. Besides that, I did some Robert Gordon things that he was producing at the time. I got along well with him, and he used to use me on these interesting sessions. He was originally involved with Seymour at Sire Records. I think they were partners in it. So I thought, "What a cool guy to produce me," especially with Seymour being the mentor of this whole thing. So Seymour asked him, and he said yes. I had a gas working with him.

As I said, I had nothing when I came to Richie. I was still asking, "What am I supposed to be doing?" But going by what Seymour said, "People want to hear *you*," Richie had a lot to do with suggesting tunes. For instance, he thought, "piano instrumental," and came up with "Cast Your Fate to the Wind," which we open the album with. It's a classic piano instrumental written by Vince Guaraldi, the jazz pianist, but cut as a pop hit by an act called Sounds Orchestral.

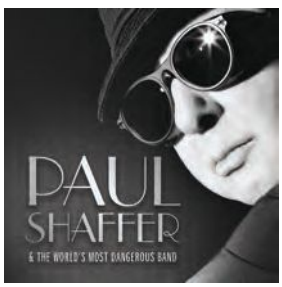
We opened it up to put a little section for a rap of some kind, and Shaggy came aboard. I asked him on a whim. It turns out he remembered who I was. He had done Letterman things and actually even hung out at the show a little in the NBC days, ironically enough. He put this Jamaican toasting thing over the top of it. We weren't even prepared for that, besides the rap section, and he transformed the whole thing. It was a knockout—what he did to it.

You have a number of other guests on the record. How did Jenny Lewis come to perform?

What happened was, Richie said to me: "Boy, I love Jenny Lewis," and I said,

"Well, I do, too! I just worked with her!" She was in Bill Murray's Christmas special [*A Very Murray Christmas* on Netflix]. She played a waitress who did a beautiful duet with him, "Baby, It's Cold Outside," and she also sang on The Pogues Christmas tune that we did ["Fairytale of New York"]. She was brilliant!

I said, "I think I might be able to ask her," which I did, and she very sweetly accepted. She sings a tune that Richie and his partners had written for The McCoys back in the day called "Sorrow." David Bowie heard a British cover that had been done by The Merseys—some call them The Merseybeats—and Bowie did a famous cover of it, too.



Did Bill Murray's appearance also come out of that same time—when you were working with him on the Netflix special?

Well, I go back with him to the '70s, before he was even on *Saturday Night Live*. His older brother Brian Doyle-Murray, who was also a well-known actor/writer in the *SNL* and Second City crew, introduced him to me. Billy and I did a few things together for the *National Lampoon Radio Hour* in '74. I'd just arrived in town and he was one of my earliest friends. So I've done a lot of things with him and he loves to do music.

Some people working on the record were wondering if we should ask him. Then, we wrote an original funk thing—Richie and me—and Richie's wife put words on it, called "Happy Street." We played it for Jenny Lewis when she was in doing her vocal and she said, "Boy, Billy should sing that." So, via text, I asked him and he immediately said, "Happy to." We ended up going down to Charleston, S.C., to record him because he was in that area. We went to a studio, and he took it very seriously. He worked with us all afternoon, singing the vocals.

When people come to your shows and see you live, what can they expect beyond the material on the new record?

For almost all the dates, the great Valerie Simpson is going to be joining us as a special guest. What an honor. She'll be featured in the middle of our show and, at that point, it's really gonna become soul heaven.

We're also going to draw on our personal experiences. We have been a band for so long and worked with so many other great artists. For instance, James Brown is a big influence on all of us. Getting to work with him as many times as I did was not only a dream come true, but it was also like a music lesson each time. So we certainly will pay due tribute to James Brown within the show, and I can tell personal stories about him, too. A number of us had some experiences with him. He was such an interesting cat and he invented so much. So I can talk about him a bit—some of it's kind of funny, too—and then we can play it o° with an examination of his actual music. That's the kind of thing we're going to be doing.

As I said, this is a band that has spent so much time working together. We did it every day for years. We are so comfortable with each other, we finish each other's licks. ❶

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however, along with rewards. "In a jam, the whole band will follow each other so well, but I'll play a wrong note—or what I consider to be a wrong note—and the whole band will go *with* me," laughs Beck. "And I'm thinking to myself, 'No, guys, don't! That's not where we're going! Caution!' But then, wrong becomes right, and something beautiful can happen out of it. It could also go the other way. But that willingness, that risk-taking, is what I really enjoy musically, and I feel lucky that the other four guys that I play music with also feel that way."

The jamband world at large, which has had a place for bluegrass since its infancy, has taken notice of Greensky and their impressive improvisation in a big way in recent years—which makes sense, given that several of the band members are card-carrying jamband fans themselves. Greensky continue to nod to their influences too, and even devoted their most recent Halloween show to reinterpreting the range of material that Phish has covered over the years.

"That community of music fans is the best," Beck says of the improvisational world. "We're so lucky that they've embraced us and like what we do. They're the best music fans because they really care about the music. That's my background: I saw every single show that Phish played in 1996. That was my music; that was *it* for me. All of us, except for Devol, were at Big Cypress [Phish's millennium-closing festival in Florida]. I'm not sure we even knew each other then."

* * *

WHILE SOME GROUPS IN THE jamband realm gain the majority of their fame and acclaim almost solely through their live performances—while delivering studio work that doesn't quite measure up—Greensky prides themselves on creating stand-alone albums that hold up under fan scrutiny, independent of their live gigs. *Shouted, Written Down & Quoted* presents a musically mature group that is more than comfortable experimenting with new techniques and effects.

"The evolution of our studio music pretty naturally mimics the evolution of our live stuff," Beck says. "One of the cool things about our band is that we can be a live band, but we can also be a studio band, whereas a lot of bands are one or the other. But we're OK with there being a separation there. We go into the studio and try to make great records, and then we try to go play great shows, but they don't necessarily have that much to do with each other. It's a juxtaposition that works really well."

A few years before their What Stage set, Greensky Bluegrass play for a decidedly more intimate audience at Bonnaroo in 2011.

With the help of Berlin, along with engineering and mastering from Michigan studio veteran Glenn Brown, who Hoffman calls "the wizard," *Shouted* takes the band down roads both well-traveled and completely new.

"We hadn't played any of the songs live before we recorded them," Hoffman says. "And that led to a lot of openness. There was no real expectation of what they would become. And I've noticed too—for myself as a songwriter, and for us as a band—there's a little less guarded pride in our ideas. It's not like someone comes to the table and is like, 'It should go *this* way.'"

Bruzza echoes this sentiment, admitting, "We were taking a different approach on a lot of the songs. It marks a lot of growth and maturity in our songwriting process and abilities as musicians. We always want to be moving forward, and that speaks to the whole jam thing. We tried some newer things that we've never done before, which was exciting, and also can be kind of scary sometimes, but the music was fulfilling."

Hoffman cites album moments like Bruzza's guitar drone in "Past My Prime" and Beck's "triumphant" dobro tone in "Living Over" as some of the points that marked the growth of the band in the studio. "It was a fun record to make," he says. "We had a lot more time to try stuff and just be open to it shifting and changing. It was a creative process. As instrumentalists in an acoustic quintet without a lot of the electronic options that other bands have, we're always trying to figure out what else we can do with our instruments and how far we can push it."

Greensky's studio work is certainly ever-expanding and always engaging, but their live show is what mainly gets the word out about the band, especially on the festival circuit, where they have become a yearly staple. This upcoming summer, whether it is at the bluegrass-centric Blue Ox or the increasingly eclectic Bonnaroo, Greensky will encounter both diehard fans and new faces. One place where the majority of the crowd will fall decidedly in the former category, though, is at Red Rocks Amphitheatre, where the group will play for the fifth time this September, marking their second-ever headlining set at the iconic venue.

"Last year, headlining it for the first time was just overwhelming," Hoffman remembers. "The fact that it sold out, and just seeing all those people there, in such a beautiful place, coveted by so many musicians as one of the greatest places to play. It's been scary over the years, that's for sure. Intimidating, but amazing."

While Bruzza admits that his first time seeing a show at Red Rocks was when Greensky made their debut at the venue opening Railroad Earth in 2013, Beck first experienced the venue during his year-long Phish marathon in 1996.

"Walking onstage for soundcheck and finding out that our show just sold out," Beck recalls, "there's this element of 'Who the fuck do we think we are?' Because, in my mind, I'm thinking, 'Well, only *big* bands sell out Red Rocks.' And then I'm like, 'Wait, does that mean…' It was an incredible pinnacle in my life and career—musically and in general—and just one of the coolest things that could ever happen."

If there was ever a watershed, "now we've made it" moment for Greensky Bluegrass, it was that night, when they stepped onstage for their own sold-out Red Rocks performance, in the same state where they got their big break at Telluride nine years earlier. And Hoffman, for his part, didn't let the experience pass him by without some reflection.

"When we were a younger band, there was that pressure going into a bar where no one knew who we were, and you had to prove yourself," he says. "And now, there's this opposite pressure: We've proven ourselves to these people and we have these expectations to meet. They travel really far and they work really hard to see us, and I think that pressure is far more intense and important to me than the other one. You know, put us under a fake name and go throw us on a festival somewhere, where no one knows who we are, and I'm not that scared to do what we do and charm them—they either like it or they don't. But send thousands of people all the way across the country to see us, and that pressure is more palpable. I take it really seriously. I always tell people that my motto is: 'Every show should be better, harder and longer.' Which is difficult to achieve, but I try every damn time."

Dean Budnick

one." We've got the Rhodes solo followed quickly by the shredding—no reverb, no delay. It's a super clean, distorted guitar solo.

A lot of the parts that Julian wrote for this album are very textural and not very show-off — not that I thought our lead guitars in the past have been show-off , but they were definitely much more melodic. A lot of the parts that Julian wrote are a little bit less melodic on this record. He is capable of shredding the guitar and he's an incredible guitar player, but he doesn't like to shred—he doesn't like to show off as much. t's not even that what he's playing on this song is that tricky, it's just not the fir t thing that I would think to play. I feel like it's very Julian.

DIAMOND EYES

COURTNEY: "Diamond Eyes" is Alex's song. He wrote that one. I like it a lot. It's stylistically very diffe ent from a song that I would've written. It's almost a nice little breather on the album. In its arrangement, it's got the acoustic guitar and the brushed shuffle beat. t feels like there's more air in the song, whereas on a lot of these songs we were purposely trying to make the sound very "made in a studio."

BLEEKER: My natural songwriting tends toward the rootsier, the folkier—the stuff that really comes out on the Freaks records. But something will come out every once in a while where I think, "You know what? The way that song sounds, the sort of melodic structure could work for Real Estate. Let me present it and see if it catches on." Of course, with "Diamond Eyes," we significantly " eal Estate-ified" it, but I went into it open to the idea that this was going to happen—that it would sound totally diffe ent than it would on a Freaks record—which is an exciting thing.

SAME SUN

COURTNEY: "Same Sun" was the last demo that I wrote before everybody got together. It's also a tricky one in terms of the arrangements. I liked it, but I hoped that we were going to do a good job of recording it because I just couldn't quite get a handle on it. Everyone's playing something very diffe ent from everyone else. The rhythm is super bouncy and, at fir t, we were just having so much fun playing it because it was so diffe ent for us, and everyone has to focus because everyone's part is pretty challenging. I was pleasantly surprised by the end result. Cole did a lot with it in terms of editing. We got a good performance and then he was able to tighten it up.

BLEEKER: The bridge sort of changed around. It was twice as long when we recorded it, and Cole cut it up. It's catchy and melodic, but kind of strange. It might be my sleeper current favorite song on the record.

SATURDAY

BLEEKER: I love the intro to this song, and I also love that this song, to me, is quintessential Real Estate. That's cool because we explored this other territory on the record. For me, I love that it's the closing track because it's this sentimental, very nostalgic, wistful return to Real Estate form. In a lot of ways, if you were to point to one song on this record and try to tell somebody what you think Real Estate sounds like, then "Saturday" illustrates it really well. I love that we elongated the intro and gave Kallman this big piano intro because we dramatize that moment, in a way. None of this was intentional; it's all looking back on it and realizing it. The other guys might not feel this way about it at all, and maybe I'm just being dramatic, but it almost feels, to me, like a curtain call: "Hey, we explored these other territories, but at the end of the day, here's Real Estate. This is what we do." r

on technology. Through a painstaking procedure matching every frame with every note—possible with digital editing advancements 40 years later—Gail and Ahmet worked tirelessly with editor John Albarian to finally ealize Frank's vision.

"Some things we couldn't put out 10 years ago, [but] now we have so many releases we can do," says Ahmet.

A week before the film s debut, Gail died of lung cancer. "We did it, Mom!" an emotional Ahmet shouted at the movie's Hollywood premiere.

* * *

AS A TRUSTEE, GAIL WAS HEAVILY involved in every aspect of the family business, right up until the end. This past December, Frank's *200 Motels (The Suites)*, which was produced by Gail and Frank Filipetti, was nominated for a Grammy Award for Best Classical Compendium. "*200 Motels (The Suites)* was an important project for Gail and a real labor of love. It was one of the last albums my mother worked on creatively," Ahmet said in a press release.

Transitions can be difficult Gail's chosen successor has experienced some clashes with his siblings. The most public ones were Ahmet's exchanges with his brother Dweezil over usage of Frank's name in merchandise, which played out, to Ahmet's expressed dismay, in open letters on social media and in *The New York Times*.

As *Freak Out!*, The Mothers of Invention's debut, marked its 50th anniversary this past summer, the Zappas' Laurel Canyon estate was sold, reportedly for $5.25 million to pop megastar Lady Gaga. On social media, fans of Frank's expressed their hopes that she will keep the quirky compound relatively intact.

"With my mother's unfortunate passing, there was so much going on—all the things that needed to happen over that year," says Ahmet.

Optimistically, he looks to the opportunities ahead. In May, Ahmet plans to open Utility Muffin esearch Kitchen's new location, and a home for a new vault. "When you're in the control room, behind you will be windows into the room, and you'll be able to see just how much content Frank made," Ahmet says. "It will be the crown jewel of this space."

Above the internal squabbles and business dealings, Ahmet says that his priority remains pleasing the fans. It was a Kickstarter campaign to fund Alex Winter's documentary *Who the F*@% Is Frank Zappa?* that opened new avenues into that community. "The communication between the fans, how passionate they are about Frank, was diffe ent through the Kickstarter environment than the way we were communicating with people through Zappa.com," says Ahmet. "It gave us this dialogue back and forth that I was overwhelmed with."

He talks of an impending website overhaul, where content will be easily searchable, including more video. In the middle of his excitement, he brainstorms an idea with Travers. "This is me spitballing right now, but we might consider a fan request—people that were at a show and wanting a specific song the remember from that night. Pick all those moments and put a disc together," imagines Ahmet. "That might be really fun."

Frank Zappa's Vault, this voluminous accumulation of his life's work, continues to mirror its maker in the best possible way. It's vast and somewhat mysterious, perhaps even intimidating, yet still accessible—and bound to keep his family and fans entertained and curious for a long time.

"People are discovering Frank now more than ever. We could just put things up and not care as much. But, for those real audiophiles, we maximize our budgets to make these sets as good as we possibly can," says Ahmet. "I couldn't be happier for Frank." r

ALISON KRAUSS

BY DEAN BUDNICK

ALISON KRAUSS' NEW ALBUM, *Windy City*, is her first release in six years—the longest span between albums of her career. "This record took so long to finish because I got burnt out" she explains. "I was having a lot of vocal problems, and I just couldn't figure out why nothing was feeling right. I saw a vocal coach and I asked, 'Why am I not liking anything I'm hearing?' And he said, 'Because you're too distracted. You've got too much stuff on your desk. When you get all this stuff done, then go back and sing.'"

She did just that through the encouragement and inspiration of producer Buddy Cannon, whose participation initiated the project. While *Windy City* is a solo record and doesn't feature all of Krauss' longtime group Union Station (whose *Paper Airplane* won the 2012 Grammy for Best Bluegrass Album and topped *Billboard*'s folk, country and bluegrass charts), three of her bandmates join her on the recording. Sidney and Suzanne Cox, Jamey Johnson, Hank Williams Jr. and several other guests also lend their talents to the captivating 10 songs—some of which are familiar, a few of which are obscure and all of which feature Krauss' clear, enchanting vocals.

What led you back into the studio to record *Windy City*?

I don't go in unless I'm inspired to do it. I don't go, "Oh, it's time to make a record." As soon as I start to contrive something, it doesn't last; it doesn't stay interesting. If something's been inspired, it is always satisfying. It doesn't get old, and it'll change with you. Even after 30 years, I can sing the same thing and the story changes in my mind. So what led me to this record was Buddy. I had the same feeling working with him that I do when I hear a song I have to sing. He makes me want to do my best.

There's a diverse collection of songs on *Windy City*. How did you come to select "River in the Rain," from the Broadway show *Big River*?

Buddy brought that. He told me it was from that play and he said he loved it. I heard it from a female perspective—the river was a man. It was a man personified as a river—the way he came in and tore up the place, flooded it and left. She never knew any better. I thought that was the perfect story.

How about John Hartford's "Gentle on My Mind," which is associated with Glen Campbell?

Buddy suggested that one as well. I sang through it one time and it felt natural. I always thought it was beautiful, but I had never sung it. It's actually interesting you picked that one because I saw the same person I saw for "River in the Rain" for "Gentle on my Mind."

When you're performing live, do you try to evoke the same mindset that you had when you recorded a given song?

When I sing stuff like, I don't try to do anything—usually, it just happens. Anytime I try, it's usually a mistake. I just kind of do it, and it's most effective when those things just show up. It's like if I get distracted in the studio and start to act a little bit. Then it can sound inauthentic. It's like false emotion.

Speaking of spontaneity, what do you remember about your time recording with Phish [on 1994's *Hoist*]?

What was so funny about that is that we were playing in Los Angeles at the Troubadour, and these guys came up and they're like, "Hey, we're in this band, and we're recording out here. Will you come and play on our record tomorrow?" I didn't know them, but Barry [Bales, Union Station's bassist] said, "I've heard of them." So I stayed overnight and recorded with them because Barry had heard of them. They could've been anybody. [*Laughs.*] The stuff that I did back then without having a clue about anything is remarkable. It turned out they were the nicest people and they were hilarious. I felt like I'd gone to school with them. "Scent of a Mule"—I still remember that song. [*She sings a few lines.*]

Then they came through here and I played with them at Starwood Amphitheatre [in Nashville]. I still didn't know anything about Phish. We played there and that place was packed! I mean, completely packed with people, and beach balls were flying everywhere. I was like, "Who are you guys?!"

It's been nearly a decade since the release of *Raising Sand*. Looking back, what did you take away from your experience recording and touring with Robert Plant?

He's a joy of a person. He's so into catching a specific moment of time in the studio and realizing how valuable that is. Up until that point, I looked at the studio as another instrument. And it *is* another instrument, but it's not more valuable than that moment in time. To watch him sing like that and capture that moment in time with his approach was important to me. It's important to remember that the studio is not just a process or an instrument or a set of tools.

The most fun part of this job, for me, is singing harmony with someone, and it was a joy to do that with him. When we did it live, though, he would never sing anything the same way twice, so I had to watch him like a hawk. [*Laughs.*] He's giggling and he's turning the other way, and I'm like, "Don't turn away. I have no idea what you're going to do! Just let me see what you're doing!" [*Laughs.*] I had to be on my toes to watch him because he's just totally free, and it was a blast.

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